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LIFE

OF

SIR MARTIN ARCHER SHEE,

P.R.A.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

LONDON
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THE LIFE

OF

SIR MARTIN ARCHER SHEE,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY, F.R.S., D.C.L.

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BY HIS SON,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE,

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE, ESQ., BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

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In Two Volumes.

VOL. I.

LONDON

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, AND ROBERTS

1860

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TO

THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY

THIS BIOGRAPHY

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

PREFACE.

WITHIN a short period after the death of Sir Martin Archer Shee, I was induced to undertake the task,—which many circumstances combined to impose on me as a duty,—of arranging and preparing for publication some memorials of a career, which,—even if considered merely in reference to the high official station with which it was so long connected,—appeared legitimately to invite a biographical record.

The performance of this duty has, however, encountered so many obstacles and delays, from the engrossing occupations of a laborious profession, and other causes, that, as far as the completion of the project is concerned, I have insensibly and unconsciously acted in conformity with the Horatian precept: "*Nonumque prematur in annum*"—without, I much fear, securing for the work all the benefit of that matured judgment and critical elaboration which the Roman poet had undoubtedly in view, when inculcating the practice of so austere a system of literary self-denial.

We have the high authority of Byron for reckoning "*partiality*" among the virtues of a historian. In the sense in which, I presume, we must interpret this theory of the noble bard, the principle might perhaps be extended to the case of the biographer, in whom a certain amount of earnest, not to say enthusiastic feeling, in favour of his subject, would generally appear to be a desirable, if not a necessary qualification, for the due execution of his task.

There is, however, one inconvenient result of this state of mind,—a result which *family* biography is peculiarly in danger of exhibiting,—viz. a tendency to give, in narration, an undue prominence or importance to details deriving their chief interest from the personal relations of the author with the individual whose actions he is recording or commemorating. I should be well pleased to think that the accompanying pages were substantially free from all liability to such an imputation; but I am far from experiencing a feeling of perfect security on this point,—which I must abandon to the charitable judgment of the reader.

A considerable portion of the work,—indeed the greater part of the second volume,—has reference to what I may term the *political history* of the Royal Academy,—and recals the memory of the gallant and successful struggle maintained by that body, in

defence of their character and rights, against the reiterated assaults to which they were exposed in the time of the late King, and during the earlier years of the present reign.

With regard to this, I had no alternative;—the official and personal career of the late President being intimately and inseparably associated with the memories of a contest, in which he bore the chief brunt of the battle, and was mainly instrumental in securing the triumph of the cause.

M. A. S.

May, 1860.

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ERRATA.

Page 47, 9th line from bottom, for "though" read "through."

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LIFE

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CHAPTER I.

1769—1783.

Birth.—Ancestral and family Details.—Death of his Mother.—His Father retires to the Country.—Early Childhood and Education.—Characteristic Anecdotes of Mr. Shee, sen.—Young Martin's first Attempt at Drawing.—Anecdotes of Boyhood.—Return to Dublin.—Incident of School Life.—He becomes a Pupil of Mr. West's Drawing Academy.—Death of his Father.

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE was born in Dublin, on the 20th December, 1769, of a family ranked by the heralds and genealogists of Ireland among the few houses tracing their origin, with reasonable authenticity, from the ancient princes or chieftains exercising sovereign sway, in far remote times, over portions of the sister country.

Whatever may be the basis of fact on which these dynastic pretensions rest, in their popular and traditional belief, there seems to be abundant evidence of the important territorial and social position occupied by the O'Shees in the counties of Kerry and Tipperary, at a period long anterior to the English expedition under

Strongbow. The acknowledged chief of the race appears to have made his formal submission to the government, and accepted his *status* as a subject of the English crown, in the reign of Richard the Second; and towards the end of the sixteenth century, we find one branch of his descendants long settled in the county of Kilkenny, and holding a conspicuous rank among the landed proprietors of that district.

In the ancient church of Kilkenny there are extant some interesting memorials of the family, which sufficiently attest the character of their ancestral claims, and have long been noted objects of curiosity and attention to the antiquarian tourist.

Among these, not the least conspicuous is the monument erected to the memory of Elias Shee, of Clanmore or Clanmorne, the younger of two brothers in whose descendants the representation of the family is now vested. This individual, described by high contemporary authority* as "a gentleman of a passing wit, a pleasant conceited companion, full of mirth without gall,"—was the direct progenitor of the subject of this biography.

With readier submission to the Anti-Hibernian and crotchety legislation, which characterised the English rule over the sister country in by-gone days, than was usually exhibited by the great Milesian families, the Shees appear to have relieved their ancient patronymic from the obnoxious prefix "O," as early as the middle of the fourteenth century; and although it has been recently resumed by the representative of the elder branch, still resident, and in the enjoyment of their hereditary estates, in the county of Kilkenny, — the

* Holinshed.

descendants of Elias of Clanmore have adhered, in writing their name, to that form of orthography, which, if less conspicuously national, has at least the sanction of uninterrupted practice during the last four centuries.

The estate of Clanmore, transmitted in the line of Elias, remained in the possession of his descendants until the Revolution of 1688, when it became the subject of one of those forfeitures to the chances of which the lands of the Roman Catholic gentry in Ireland were in that century so frequently exposed, on very trivial pretexts of confiscation. Whatever may have been the political delinquency, real or imputed, of the dispossessed owner of Clanmore, the loss of his estate seems to have been unattended with the more serious personal results that affected so many of his contemporaries; and it is therefore fair to conclude that his offences were rather assumed by parliamentary rigour, than established by legal proof.

Be this as it may, the Clanmore branch of the family, thus deprived of their lands in Kilkenny, migrated to the county of Mayo, where, at an early period of the last century, we find them located at or near Castlebar, and occupying a position among the ancient gentry of that county, for which they were apparently more indebted to the *prestige* of their well-known descent, than to the value or extent of their property.

George Shee, Esq., of Castlebar, the head of this branch of the family, married Mary, daughter of Martin Kirwan, Esq., of Blindwell, in the county of Galway, and by that lady had four sons, the youngest of whom, named Martin after his maternal grandfather, was the father of the late President.

The position of the Roman Catholic gentry in Ireland

during the greater part of the last century, was singularly mortifying and anomalous. Every avenue to distinction—political, social, or professional—was closed against the ambition of a large body of men, full of ancestral pride, and often conscious of talents calculated to shed lustre on their name and country. In their case, the commonest requirements of a gentleman's education were unattainable except through the evasion of laws, so intolerant in spirit and cruel in operation, that their strict enforcement was a moral impossibility. Reminded, at every step of their career, of the political inferiority to which they were hopelessly condemned, they had too often to assert their social equality at the point of a sword, worn in defiance of insulting statutes, and to which they were ever prompt to resort, as its skilful and intrepid use was, according to the code of a semi-barbarous chivalry, the most effectual test of their aristocratic pretensions.

Under such adverse circumstances, it is a source of wonder, that the impoverished and degraded class still contrived to maintain themselves on an intellectual and social level with their fellow-countrymen of the same grade who professed the dominant religion, and to supply the ranks of Irish society with a fair proportion of sound scholars and accomplished gentlemen.

Notwithstanding the pressure of these obstructive influences on the early prospects of Mr. Shee, as an adherent of the proscribed faith, family tradition and the reminiscences of his more distinguished son leave no room to doubt that he was a man of a highly cultivated mind, of considerable classical attainments, and of a ready and playful wit. He was, however, as we have seen, the youngest son of a Roman Catholic house, but scantily provided with the goods of fortune. To an

individual so situated, the choice of a career presented in those days but two courses obviously open to his ambition: the military service of a foreign state; or commerce, in some shape, at home. Circumstances, or inclination, led him to the adoption of the latter alternative. Early in life he engaged in business as a merchant in Dublin.

It is probable, however, that he was less qualified for the arduous struggle of commercial enterprise, than for the light conflict of wit in the gay circles of what was then a brilliant metropolis; circles to which his family connexions and personal merit insured him a ready access. Nor was he, there is some reason to believe, wholly free from that untoward administrative peculiarity which one may almost venture to characterise as part of the national *idiosyncrasy*, viz. an inaptitude for living within his income. Certain it is that his success in commercial pursuits, at one period satisfactory, was not permanent, and that, before his marriage, he had experienced losses in trade which crippled his resources and obliged him greatly to reduce his scale of expenditure.

While still a bachelor, and in the enjoyment of real or apparent prosperity, Mr. Shee was attacked by a complaint in his eyes; and owing, it is said, to unskilful treatment on the part of his medical adviser, who caused large quantities of blood to be taken from the back of his head by the operation of cupping, he became totally and permanently blind. This calamity, as related by him in after years to his children, was singular and awfully sudden in its occurrence. Although he was under medical treatment, in consequence of what appeared to be an inflammation of an ordinary character, his sight had not been perceptibly impaired. On the day in question he had read the newspaper, had attended

to his usual avocations, and was well enough to receive some intimate friends at dinner. While he sat at the head of his table, engaged in cheerful conversation with his guests, all around him became suddenly dark; the external world had vanished from his eyes instantaneously, and for ever!

His friends, surprised to see him abruptly start up from his chair, and leave the room with uncertain steps, remained for some minutes in perplexity as to the cause of his departure. At length, alarmed by the delay, one of the company ventured upstairs to inquire after him, and on entering the drawingroom, discovered his unfortunate host on his knees, audibly engaged in fervent prayer, and expressing his Christian resignation to the Divine Will, under the infliction of so severe a chastisement for the sins of his past life.

Among the most intimate friends of his prosperous days was John Archer, like himself, a *cadet* of an ancient Catholic family (the Archers of Riverstown, in the county of Meath), and, like himself, engaged in commercial pursuits in Dublin. This gentleman, left a widower at an early age, retired, in the prime of life, into the country, where he died a few years later, leaving two orphan daughters. The eldest of these, Mary, described by family tradition as a young lady of great personal attractions and much natural talent,—while still in the bloom of youth, was wooed and won by her late father's old friend and contemporary, Mr. Shee, in spite of the sad affliction under which he laboured in the loss of sight, and the great disparity of age between them, which that fearful privation rendered only the more painfully conspicuous.

Yet the marriage was apparently one of affection on both sides. The lady was, indeed, in the strict *genealo-*

gical sense, an *heiress*, and in that character brought some accession of ancestral glories to the *blason* of her husband's family, whose shield already displayed from earlier alliances, the golden bird-bolts of the Archers in juxtaposition with their own hereditary *fleurs-de-lys*. But the *inheritance* was chiefly *heraldic*, and attended with but few of those financial advantages inseparable from the purport of the term in its usual acceptation. On the other hand, there was little in the position of Mr. Shee to compensate the inevitable annoyances encountered by the youthful bride, in uniting herself with one so dependent on those around him, for all that can afford healthful occupation to the mind, or lighten the cares of existence.

Of four children born of the marriage, two alone survived the period of early infancy. Before the birth of her fourth and youngest child, — the subject of this biography, — the symptoms of pulmonary disease had clearly manifested themselves in Mrs. Shee's system; and when her son first saw the light, his infant frame appeared so unusually delicate and fragile, as to afford but slight hopes for the preservation of a life destined, however, to be prolonged beyond the usual limits of human existence, and, until within a few years of its termination, blessed with a singular immunity from the more serious physical ills that "flesh is heir to."

The fatal disease which had already marked the young mother for its victim, continued its gradual but inevitable progress. Mrs. Shee died in the month of October, 1771, having lingered for a year and ten months, after the birth of her son Martin. One other child, an elder brother, George, — the senior, by four or five years, of the late President, — also survived their mother.

To a child of tender age, the loss of an amiable and exemplary mother is, in most cases, an irreparable calamity. But in this instance, the place of his deceased parent was so effectually supplied by the admirable relative to whom Mrs. Shee, in her last moments, had confided the care of her infant boy, that, in justice to the memory of this *second mother*, it must be said that Sir Martin need hardly claim any considerable share of the reader's sympathy, on the score of this early bereavement.

The excellent woman to whose affection he was indebted, not merely in infancy, but during a long course of years, for every kind and generous office that maternal tenderness could suggest, was his mother's only sister. Married in early youth to a country gentleman of small fortune, whose sudden and accidental death had left her a childless widow at the age of twenty-one, Mrs. MacEvoy had taken up her abode with her brother-in-law and sister, during the lingering illness of the latter; and from the moment of Mrs. Shee's death, she devoted herself to the care of her orphan nephews, and the comfort of their bereaved and afflicted father, with the most exemplary assiduity and affection.

Disqualified by his loss of sight from effective exertion, at a period when his circumstances required an increase of mental and bodily energy, and with a spirit crushed for a time by his severe domestic calamity, Mr. Shee, not long after the death of his wife, determined on leaving Dublin, and retiring from active occupation. Having wound up his affairs, and realized the small surplus of property that remained after the discharge of his commercial liabilities, he removed to the county of Wicklow, where, with his sister-in-law and his two infant boys, he established himself in a

small cottage residence at Cookstown, in the romantic neighbourhood of the Dargle.

The restricted means of the family rendered a scrupulous economy necessary in the management of their expenditure; but the time of their residence at Cookstown, and subsequently at Bray in the same county,—to which place Mr. Shee removed when his son Martin was about seven or eight years of age,—was remembered by the latter as a period of much domestic happiness and youthful enjoyment. The comparative seclusion in which they lived was occasionally interrupted by friendly intercourse with a few families among the surrounding gentry, and rare but welcome visits from old friends and connexions resident in Dublin. The bold and picturesque character of the scenery, so well known in our day to the English tourist, was well calculated to enhance the charms of a country life to a lad of a sensitive and highly imaginative temperament; and in after-life, Sir Martin's reminiscences loved to dwell on the locality as the scene of many a childish joy, and as identified with his earliest and most vivid impressions of sylvan beauty.

In this retirement, the education and moral training of his children became the engrossing occupation of the blind father, who was not slow to discover in the childish sallies of his youngest son, indications of varied talent, with the germ of that mental energy which stimulates to great intellectual exertion, and is seldom long quiescent under failure or defeat. Sprightly and impetuous in temper, but docile and affectionate in disposition,—active to volatility in all his boyish habits and amusements, but from the first moment when he had mastered the art of reading, a very devourer of books,—young Martin seemed at that early age to

exhibit a combination of mental and physical qualities, not perhaps unfrequently co-existing in after-life, but seldom simultaneously developed in childhood.

The character and habits of Mr. Shee were well adapted to foster and direct those happy tendencies which want of sympathy might have repressed, or injudicious encouragement misguided. Strong sense, refined taste, and high moral feeling appear to have been the characteristics of his mind; while a playful wit, wholly free from ill-nature, and a buoyancy of spirit that misfortune had failed to subdue, rendered his society attractive alike to old and young. If his "*old Latin*," like that of Queen Elizabeth, had "*long lain rusting*," he, like the Virgin Queen, contrived to "*furbish it up*" to some purpose, when occasion required that he should bring it into use; for, at a very early age, his son Martin, under his sightless guidance, had mastered the formidable asperities of Lilly's grammar, and without the stimulating influence of birch or bamboo, fought his way manfully through all the intermediate bugbears of elementary study, to the bright and graceful pages of the Æneid.

It is perhaps to the taste thus early acquired for classical literature, under circumstances which relieved the pursuit of ancient knowledge from some of its traditional terrors, that Sir Martin's subsequent youthful ardour in the cause may be mainly attributed. Certain it is, that when, some years later, he was suddenly deprived of all extrinsic assistance to his studies, at an age when the education of a youth is usually little more than begun, his unaided exertions to supply the deficiency of Academical training, were such as genuine enthusiasm could alone have suggested and sustained.

A few traits illustrative of the character and mind

of a father to whose memory Sir Martin was devotedly attached, and whose early precepts and example were not without a salutary influence on his career, will perhaps not be wholly out of place in this narrative.

Mr. Shee, among other pleasantly available social qualities, had a decided turn for jocular *vers de société*, a gift which, in addition to many higher poetical attributes, was not wholly denied to his son. If any event, suggestive of ludicrous ideas or associations, occurred to disturb the monotony of the peaceful village life to which he had resigned himself, his homely and laughter-loving muse acknowledged a welcome inspiration; and on such occasions, requesting his sister-in-law, or one of his sons, to take pen, ink and paper, he would, without observable previous reflection, and *currente linguâ*, dictate to his amanuensis couplet after couplet of easy-flowing and humorous doggrel, the transcript of which served to awaken the joyous echoes of many a neighbouring fireside. Scanty, indeed, are the records of his *Musa pedestris;* but family tradition has preserved some fragmentary evidence of his aptitude for this humble species of composition, which justifies a passing regret that the demonstration is not more complete. I select one slight example, as it is not ill-calculated to exhibit the peculiar turn of Mr. Shee's humour, while the circumstance in which it originated affords a curious illustration of the state of morals, some eighty years ago, among the inhabitants of a rural district, within a morning's drive of Dublin.

It would seem that the peasantry of Bray were, in those days, exemplary in the observance of the precepts of religion and morality, and that the influence of the parish priest, a simple-minded St. Omer-bred *curé*, was

formidably effective in checking the inroads of vice among his flock.

Backslidings, however, will occur in the most primitively virtuous communities; and it chanced that one of the parishioners, a licentious and but too fascinating tailor, had fatally compromised the character of an interesting young laundress of previous good repute in the village. The affair got wind; the shame of the damsel and the baseness of the seducer became generally known. Father Roche, appealed to by the indignant and afflicted friends of the victim,—who, unable to encounter the disgrace of her unfortunate position in the midst of her associates and connexions, had fled from the neighbourhood,—denounced the culprit from the altar, and solemnly interdicted him from all participation in the sacred rites of the Church. The effect of this excommunication, for such it might be practically considered, was most severely felt by the seducer in all his social relations. He wandered through the village, ungreeted by his equals, unnoticed by his superiors, and shunned like a *pestiféré* by all the women and children of the district; his shop-board was deserted, and his trade at a stand-still. In real or well simulated repentance, he sought by submission to soften the heart of his ecclesiastical censor. The priest was, or feigned to be, inexorable; and the despairing and now thoroughly repentant Lothario was forced to seek extraneous aid for the purpose of mollifying the sacerdotal rigour. The few friends who had not wholly deserted him in his disgrace at length bethought themselves, that the intercession of Mr. Shee, as one of the most important and respected parishioners, might possibly induce Father Roche to remove his formidable censure. Mr. Shee was accordingly applied to, and prevailed upon to undertake the task. But distrusting

the result, or anxious to avoid the annoyance of a serious argument on the subject, he determined to try the effect of a jocular treatment of the case; and summoning his amanuensis, he proceeded rapidly to dictate an epistle in verse, purporting to be addressed by his son Martin, then a child eight or nine years old, to Father Roche, in which the penitence of the offender, and the various motives for clemency were set forth in strains possibly more humorous than reverential, and winding-up the forcible appeal for mercy with the following expressive and "suggestive" couplet:—

"Oh! pity his case then, and grant him a listening,
What you've lost in the wedding, you'll gain by the christening."

Ex pede Herculem! The remonstrance was attended with immediate success; but it is said that the worthy priest was rather nettled at the sarcasm involved in the *argumentum ad crumenam* so ingeniously put forward by his poetical petitioner, and that some temporary interruption of cordiality between them was the consequence.

It was a singular fact that the disease which deprived Mr. Shee of sight had not in any degree affected the appearance of his eyes, which were unusually bright, and, to all outward seeming, full of intelligence,—ever directing themselves, with unerring precision, towards the person whom he was addressing in conversation. It happened not unfrequently, that a stranger passed a whole evening in his society, charmed with his lively manner and ready wit, without for a moment suspecting the existence of his calamity.

This peculiarity of his case was a source of great amusement to himself; and he delighted to make it subservient to purposes of harmless *mystification*, a practice to which, like most of his countrymen, he was

not a little addicted. On one occasion, finding himself at a friendly dinner-party in company with a stranger who, unaware of his blindness, engaged him in a political discussion, he affected such heat of temper, and so fire-eating a tone in argument, that, by little and little, the dispute seemed to expand into a formidable quarrel; until, at length, as the time for joining the ladies arrived, Mr. Shee started up from his chair, and with every appearance of the greatest excitement, made his way rapidly to the door, loudly proclaiming his resolve to claim immediate satisfaction at the hands of his opponent. The bewildered politician, however, was speedily relieved from his unpleasant anticipation of "consequences," by the unanimous burst of merriment that followed the impetuous exit of his ferocious antagonist,—soon explained by the comfortable assurance that Sir Lucius O'Trigger's "very pretty *small-sword-light*," and any amount of meridian splendour which that worthy might have considered sufficient for "a long shot," would be equally unavailable for all warlike purposes, to the eyes which for the previous ten minutes had been flashing such indignant defiance at him.

The buoyancy of spirit which enabled Mr. Shee thus to make a jest of his own misfortune, was not the result of temporary exhilaration produced by the presence of cheerful society. It was characteristic of his habitual frame of mind. No sigh of regret, no murmur of complaint on the subject of his privation, was ever heard from his lips. Reduced to the sad necessity of guessing at the countenances of his sons, by passing his hand over those features on which his eyes had never been permitted to rest, he would dwell complacently on the idea that he had obtained a perfectly accurate impression of their form and character, declaring his convic-

tion that, if suddenly restored to sight, he should be able to recognise his boys at a single glance. And this fanciful delusion, by means of which alone he contrived to *individualise* the outward appearance of all he loved best on earth, seemed his effectual consolation.

That he was not, however, deficient in keen sympathy for those who laboured under similar affliction, the following incident will show.

At a particular spot in the village of Cookstown, a certain blind beggar, well known to the neighbourhood, took his daily stand, appealing to the benevolence of the passers-by. As this "station" lay in the line of the walks which Mr. Shee frequently took, accompanied by his sons, on one or other of whom he depended for the guidance of his steps, many were the stray half-pence that little Martin was commissioned to drop into the old hat perseveringly held out to receive the offerings of the charitable. It chanced that, on one occasion, as Mr. Shee had just passed, leaning on the arm of his eldest son, the little boy, then about six or seven years of age, who had loitered a few steps behind, took it into his head, in a spirit of childish frolic, to play off a joke on the poor blind man; and running up, he lightly touched the crown of the hat with the tip of his finger; thereby producing, with tolerable accuracy, the sound and vibration usually attendant on the descent of the eleemosynary *copper* into that receptacle. The poor man, completely deceived, vociferated the accustomed blessing, to his charitable neighbour, Mr. Shee; and great was the glee of the little *espiègle*, as he viewed from a safe distance the rapidly succeeding disappointment of his victim, eagerly and vainly searching for the phantom coin.

So far all was well. The delinquent rejoined his

party, in full confidence of impunity for his cruel practical joke. But retribution was at hand. The blind man, like most of those who have lost their sight, had very acute powers of hearing. He was not long in guessing the quarter whence his annoyance had proceeded; and when the walking party approached his station on their return home, he at once called out to Mr. Shee, relating the trick so successfully played off upon him, and boldly denouncing the perpetrator.

Without a moment's hesitation or parley, the blind father seized on the culprit, and dragging him up to his victim, obliged him to go down on his knees in the muddy road, and humbly solicit forgiveness from the poor man whose poverty and helplessness he had so thoughtlessly insulted.

The severe lesson was certainly not lost on him for whose improvement it was intended. The principle which it inculcated of respect and sympathy for the misfortunes and privations of the humbler classes of society, was one of which in after-life he was always peculiarly mindful; and no one was ever more prompt to exhibit a kind and indulgent consideration for the feelings of those beneath him.

To a child of quick intellect and lively imagination, the constant companionship of a clever, accomplished, and high-bred man, in whom the affection of the father predominates over the discipline of the pedagogue, is a rare and precious advantage. Maxims of religion and morality, though conveyed in the awful words of scripture, are but faintly and tediously impressed on the mind of infancy, through the discipline of the school-room. The details of the catechism are, of necessity, as weary a task as the declension of Latin nouns and the mysteries of the multiplication table. The collect of

the day and the text of the sermon are usually among the darkest clouds which obscure the brightness of the school-boy's Sunday.

In order to give the lessons of Divine wisdom their full practical effect, a gentler and less systematic process of instruction must come in aid of the dry, didactic course; or else, as sad experience too often shows, "the words of eternal life," flogged into the memory of the boy, simultaneously with the harsh rudiments of profane learning, are still more speedily forgotten or neglected by the man. But where the precepts of honour, manliness, and virtue flow without apparent premeditation from the lips of one whose example naturally supplies our standard of thought and action,—when they are brought home to our feelings as the guide of *his* conduct, and the valued result of *his* experience,—then, indeed, do the impressive words and the truths they embody sink deep into the youthful heart; and the child is not slow to discover, or reluctant to admit, their close connexion with the doctrines of religion, and their main dependence on the sublime maxims of our holy faith.

The peculiar circumstances of Mr. Shee's position, as well as his own personal qualities, tended to secure for the infancy of his children the full benefit derivable from this early and constant association with the wisdom of maturer years: It is beyond a doubt, that many of the brightest points of Sir Martin's moral and social character were traceable to principles indelibly impressed on his infant mind by the instruction and example of his excellent parent.

The scrupulous adherence to truth, the unfailing candour, the high and punctilious sense of honour, the contempt of everything mean, paltry, or selfish in con-

duct,—which all who knew the late President will acknowledge to have been among his peculiar characteristics, were, in his case, not merely matters of ethical or social doctrine, but points of *hereditary faith*, for which his memory loved to recal the appropriate traditionary maxims, through whose medium they had been early recommended to his observance.

Fully, indeed, and gratefully did he estimate the benefit of this mental training; and to the revered name of his father he was ever ready to pay the tribute of filial homage so beautifully embodied in the words of Horace:

> "Si neque avaritiam, neque sordes, nec mala lustra
> Objiciet vere quisquam mihi: purus et insons
> (Ut me collaudem) si et vivo carus amicis,
> Causa fuit pater his." — *Sat.* I. 10.

In the midst, however, of the highly orthodox precepts of this social faith, which Mr. Shee so strenuously inculated on his children, it is not to be denied that a few doctrines had crept in which a strict and impartial philosophy would be tempted to brand as *heretical*, or at least, as highly *superstitious*. Among these was a belief, very religiously entertained by him, in the moral superiority inseparable from ancient lineage, with a corresponding readiness to ascribe every unworthy action or sentiment chargeable against any person of obscure or plebeian origin, to the influence of his genealogical deficiencies. If, as may well be supposed, Sir Martin's maturer intellect in after days, was unable fully to acquiesce in these crabbed articles of the paternal faith, it cannot be asserted that he was ever wholly free from the impression which their early reception had produced. To the last, whenever he observed any deviation from the highest standard of delicacy or moral

feeling, on the part of one whom merit or accident had raised from an humble class of life to the social level of gentlemen, it seldom failed to elicit a contemptuous allusion to the *yellow clay*, which was supposed to enter largely into the composition of the offender.

It happened during Mr. Shee's residence at Cookstown, that young Martin, then about six years of age, accompanied his father and aunt, on a visit of some days, to the country-house of a friend who lived a few miles off in the same county. In the bedroom appropriated to the use of Mr. Shee and his little boy, during their stay, there was a large fireplace, the sides of which were decorated with Dutch tiles, illustrative of different passages from Scripture. Great was the delight with which the future President gazed on these rude specimens of historic art; and his growing enthusiasm soon suggested a desire to emulate the pictorial wonders for the first time displayed before his admiring eyes.

Accordingly, one Sunday morning, when by reason of the unfavourable state of the weather, it had been thought advisable to dispense with his attendance at mass, he took advantage of the absence of the rest of the party at the parish chapel, to make a first and unobserved essay of his artistic powers; and having, by some means, succeeded in obtaining materials more or less available for his purpose, he contrived, before the return of the family, to produce copies of some of the subjects which had most strongly affected his fancy. The domestic tradition, on this point, is indeed so startling, and apparently so illustrative of the exaggeration often unconsciously connected with the affectionate records of precocious talent, in the case of those who have realized, by subsequent eminence, the flattering promise of their early years, that I cannot pretend to relate it

with any *robust* faith in its historical accuracy. It is said, however, that the instrument with which he traced on paper the outlines of the various scenes that had fascinated him in their fictile representation, was the *handle of a pewter spoon.* Two reasons strongly incline me to the belief that this statement should be treated as an instance of rhetorical amplification, rather than as a dry record of fact. In the first place, it trenches closely on the *impossible*, a state of things which, although not *conclusive*, affords certainly very plausible grounds for historic doubt in all cases; and, secondly, although I have frequently heard from Sir Martin's lips, his own version of the story, founded on personal recollection of the circumstances, and in all other material points tallying with the account above given, I cannot recal to mind any mention by him of the unwonted and unwieldy *stylus* which he is reported to have used on the occasion.

But whatever may have been the accurate details of this first graphic attempt, it is certain that to the incident here recorded, he was wont to trace his devotion to the art in which he ultimately achieved such honourable distinction. His efforts at imitation, rude and grotesque as they must have been, were nevertheless such as to excite the wonder and applause of the affectionate and friendly critics to whom they were submitted; and the present of a small drawing-box, well supplied with proper materials, together with free access to some more legitimate and improving objects of study, in the shape of engravings and sketches, gave an early stimulus to his exertions, and tended, no doubt, to develop a passing whim into a steady and ardent passion for the art.

To what extent the taste thus early acquired was

allowed to encroach on or influence the system of his general education, cannot now be accurately conjectured. It would not appear, however, that his love for drawing had the effect of restricting his childish ambition, or diminishing his industry, in other pursuits. He had a natural love of knowledge, which made him ever attentive at his studies, and an ardent spirit of emulation, easily roused to activity by the sight or the record of successful talent in any department of human exertion.

A somewhat ludicrous illustration of this quality was afforded by him on one occasion, when to the surprise of his family he was missing at the usual dinner hour, and having been sought for in vain through all his accustomed haunts, was at length discovered in a remote garret, diligently striving to stand and balance himself on a rope, the ends of which he had, with some ingenuity, secured to two pieces of furniture at opposite corners of the apartment. It appeared that, a day or two previously, he had for the first time witnessed some dancing on the tight-rope at a neighbouring fair; and his admiration of the performance had immediately suggested and actively developed an earnest desire to emulate the agile exploits of the itinerant funambulist.

During their residence at Bray, Mr. Shee and his sister-in-law formed the acquaintance of an elderly French lady who occupied a neighbouring cottage or villa. This lady, whose name was Madame Marcel, but of whose position or history I am unable to give any account, was early attracted by the sprightly manners and engaging disposition of young Martin, for whom she conceived a great fondness, in proof of which she volunteered the task of instructing him in the French language. The offer was gladly accepted; and Martin,

ever a willing scholar, eagerly availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded him of acquiring what was, in those days, a far rarer accomplishment than at present. In spite of the high poetical authority which throws its halo round the well-known sentiment, it must be conceded that it is not always a very "delightful task to teach the young idea how to shoot," especially when that "young idea" has to be trained or guided through the labyrinth of a foreign grammar and vocabulary. With the good-humoured Frenchwoman, however, it was truly a labour of love. "*Votre fils est un prodige*," was often her wondering comment, addressed to Mr. Shee, on the progress of her young and ready pupil; and there can be little doubt that his aptitude for the acquisition of every species of knowledge was such as to justify some amount of surprise on the part of those who had the direction of his studies. It is certain that under Madame Marcel's friendly tuition, he rapidly attained a degree of proficiency which enabled him to converse in French with fluency and tolerable correctness, and placed within his reach the abundant literary treasures of that language, an inexhaustible mine of intellectual enjoyment to him through life.

The neighbourly intercourse between his family and Madame Marcel was productive of benefit to him in a matter of less importance. The lady had a man-servant, blessed (or afflicted) with a taste for music, which exhibited itself in the ordinary form of *fiddle-scraping*. The tuneful catgut found a chord responsive in the soul of little Martin, who soon felt an eager ambition to rival the harmonious triumphs of this domestic Orpheus.

Popular alike in the drawing-room and in the pantry,

the young *would-be Crichton* had soon coaxed his musical friend to give him a few lessons on his *cremona;* and in due course of time, the flattering evidence of the boy's progress induced his indulgent father to procure for him one of those diminutive specimens of the *genus violin*, which, in those days, and long afterwards, were wont to accompany the steps and give effect to the illustrative graces of the dancing-master. Armed with this humble, but, as the event proved, formidable *kit*, Martin now devoted a large portion of his leisure to the study of the instrument, and accordingly became, in a short time, so decided a nuisance within doors, that a paternal edict, restricting the exercise of his musical powers to the *outside* of the house, was the very natural consequence. Then it was, if tradition can be relied on, that with unabated ardour, he would seek refuge daily, and for hours together, in a *small detached building*, situated in a *retired part* of the little garden attached to the cottage in which the family resided; and in this "shady blest retreat," remote from human eye, and out of reach of all critical or fastidious ears, he would resolutely encounter the difficulties of the shifting scale, and school his tiny fingers to that accuracy of pressure on the strings, the early attempts at which constitute so fearful an infliction on the nerves of uninterested bystanders.

It will be readily believed that his expansive spirit of ambition did not fail to impel him at an early age to literary effort. Full of boyish sympathy for the stern heroes of republican Rome, his enthusiasm found vent in a tragedy on the subject of Virginius, vigorously commenced when he was about ten years of age. What place this precocious manifestation of the dramatic spirit may have been entitled to assume among the "Curiosi-

ties of Literature," I am unable to surmise; as no fragment of the work remains to guide the critical judgment in the matter. That family tradition, however, to which I have perhaps too frequently referred as presumptively authoritative, is silent as to the merit of the ambitious attempt. It may therefore be fairly assumed, on a principle somewhat analogous to that which, at the Court of Versailles, dictated the rapid decision of Grammont on a contested point in the royal game,—that there was nothing in the performance calculated to excite the surprise of the youthful poet's friends, beyond a rather early development of literary tendencies.

Meantime, if his mind was at work with a degree of energy unusual at his age, his bodily activity fully kept pace with the restless mobility of his mental faculties; nor was there any lack of spirit or enterprise in his out-door amusements. The unrestricted freedom of a country life, in a hilly and romantic region, effectually secured him from the physical disadvantages often attendant on domestic education.

Perhaps, too, his father's blindness, by exempting him from the too constant ocular vigilance that anxious parents are prone to exercise over children brought up at home, tended to develop his personal resources, and encourage those habits of self-reliance, which are generally supposed to be most effectually attainable in the rough social discipline of that miniature commonwealth, a public school.

Although deprived, during his hours of study, of the stimulus supplied by the contest and emulation of the school-room, the rivalry of rural sports and athletic exercises was not unknown to his hours of recreation. Not only had he in his brother, who was a few years his

senior, a constant companion well qualified to lead the way in all paths of exciting or perilous adventure, and very certain to suggest, by his example, every conceivable feat of boyish daring, but at the neighbouring castle of Shankhill, the residence of his father's old friend Mr. Lawless, between whose numerous family and that of Mr. Shee habits of the most cordial intimacy and daily intercourse existed, young Martin found more than one congenial spirit ever on the alert for fun or mischief, and with true Hibernian alacrity, eager to give, or prompt to obey, the welcome summons to the frolic or the fray.

Many of the happiest days of Sir Martin's childhood were passed under the hospitable roof of Shankhill; and the memories of that period which, in after years, he would most fondly recal, bore ample testimony to the social merits and sterling qualities of its family circle.

In his novel (if it may be so called) of Oldcourt,—a work which, however irregular in plan, and ramblingly discursive in execution, certainly contains some of the most animated pictures of real life and sketches of individual character that modern romantic literature can supply,—he has recorded many local details and personal traits connected with the haunts and associates of his boyish days. In particular I may mention that the description, at once touching and humorous, of the chapel and parish priest of Oldcourt, which will be found in the eighth and ninth chapters of that work, conveys a perfectly accurate transcript of the author's personal reminiscences with regard to the humble place of worship where his early devotions were performed, and the unpretending minister of religion from whose lips he first received instruction in the doctrines of his

ancient faith; while the sketches of the family of Old-court Castle are, with considerably more latitude of deviation in the details, copied from the main features and characteristics of the establishment at Shankhill.

It was in connexion with the social *réunions* of Shankhill, that an event occurred which had probably no trifling influence on Sir Martin's subsequent career, although its immediate relation to his fortunes may not be very obvious. This was the second marriage of his aunt, Mrs. MacEvoy. During one of the frequent visits paid by herself and her brother-in-law to their friend Mr. Lawless, she made the acquaintance, and won the admiration, of a gentleman of the name of Dillon, of the family of the earls of Roscommon, who like so many other junior branches of the Irish Catholic aristocracy, had sought in trade the only means within his reach of restoring the fallen fortunes of an ancient house. Prosperous in circumstances, and highly estimable in character, Mr. Dillon, in spite of a considerable disparity of years, found favour in the eyes of the still young and handsome widow, and after a due period of courtship, they were married.

To Mr. Shee, the loss of the domestic society of his sister-in-law, who, on her marriage, went to reside in Dublin, was a severe privation; and perhaps the withdrawal of her income from their common stock involved the necessity of an important change in his arrangements. Be this as it may, his residence at Bray was not prolonged much beyond the date of Mrs. Dillon's marriage. The advancing years of his children, and the consequent necessity of taking some steps for their future establishment in life, rendered a return to the metropolis a matter of expediency in many points of view. For his eldest son, then about sixteen years of

age, he had obtained a situation in a mercantile house in Dublin; and the brilliant promise of young Martin's expanding intellect at the age of twelve, could not but suggest the importance of securing for his talents a more regular system of cultivation than was within the father's reach or means at Bray.

To Dublin, accordingly, they removed in the course of the year 1781, and took up their abode in that city at the house of a distant connexion, to whom Mr. Shee appears to have imprudently entrusted the management and control of the little property which remained to him, and with whom he made what he intended to be a permanent arrangement for his future residence and support. His health, indeed, began to give way about this time; and the symptoms of approaching decay, of which he was himself conscious long before any outward manifestation of their existence was perceptible in his spirits or demeanour, made him comparatively indifferent to his own comfort; while his anxiety respecting the fate of his youngest son was painfully increased by the strong conviction, that he should not live to protect or guide this beloved child, through even the earliest steps of his worldly career.

During the first twelve months of his residence in Dublin, young Martin was sent as a day scholar to a school conducted by a small body of Dominican friars in that city. Here his attendance was regular, his diligence exemplary, and, as might be expected, his progress in classical learning considerable.

The heads of the establishment were, according to his own report in later years, men of learning and ability, remarkable for their gentlemanly manners and deportment. Of his schoolfellows, twenty or thirty in number, his reminiscences were not so satisfactory, there

being among them but one, who, like himself, was willing to profit by the advantages afforded to them by the zeal and erudition of the masters. The exercises of the whole class were commonly the production of young Shee or his equally energetic fellow-student; their own tasks being performed with such ease and rapidity, that they were content to while away the redundant school hours by doing the work of their more idle or less gifted companions.

Of his school career, there is little more to relate. One slight incident, however, is worth recording as a significant indication of character on his part, exhibiting, as it does, in a conspicuous light, the pride, independence, and resolute firmness of his disposition at the early age of twelve or thirteen.

It chanced that one day, as he stood with the rest of his class, before the desk of the principal, Father F——, under examination in the mysteries of Horace or Virgil, a question addressed to his next neighbour in the ranks elicited an incorrect and particularly stolid answer. The pedagogue, provoked by a degree of stupidity which seemed to call for immediate retribution, seized the open book before him, and without raising his eyes from the desk, on which probably lay some object that was dividing his attention with his school duties, directed against the offender a smart blow which, by reason of the negligent manner in which it was administered, missed its legitimate object, and alighted with edifying sound and formidable *à-plomb*, on the innocent ear and cheek of young Shee.

Fire flashed from the eyes, and the red blood rapidly mounted to the temples of the astonished and indignant scholar, who felt that he had never deserved, and until that moment had never been subjected to, that form of

scholastic discipline. Without uttering a word, he at once fell out of the rank, took up his hat, and deliberately walking out of the schoolroom, immediately left the house. Arrived at home, and questioned by his father as to the cause of his unexpected return at an unusual hour, he related, with every symptom of the most violent indignation, the insult which had been inflicted on him, and concluded his narrative by declaring that no earthly power or authority should induce him to set his foot again within the school-house, until he had received a distinct and ample apology from Father F——.

Reasoning and authoritative remonstrance were alike employed in vain, for the purpose of altering his resolve. Perhaps this display of spirit was secretly acceptable to his father, however expedient he might think it to affect a tone of displeasure on the occasion, for the sake of the general principle involved. Certain it is that Martin carried his point, and obtained full satisfaction for his wrongs. Father F—— finding, not only that the boy had disappeared for that day, but that the next day wore on without the arrival of his diligent and susceptible pupil,—thought it advisable to call on Mr. Shee for the combined purpose of inquiry and explanation; and on ascertaining the extent of resentment produced by his unlucky and misplaced assault, and being informed of the terms on which alone the injured dignity of his victim could be appeased, he did not hesitate to adopt the suggestion, and was content to secure the return of his "pattern" scholar, by at once offering the required apology. It may be presumed that the lesson, which the *nonchalant* principal had certainly deserved, was not without its beneficial effect in guiding his hand with more discriminative accuracy on

all subsequent occasions which called for the infliction of summary justice on his part.

In the meantime, Mr. Shee's declining health, and young Martin's daily increasing love of drawing, suggested the necessity of taking some decisive steps with a view to his future career. Far too young to enter on the preliminary studies connected with professional life in any other department of intellectual exertion to which his talents might have been applied, he had already, as the fond father was assured by partial friends, mastered the most formidable rudiments of the graphic art, and attained a degree of proficiency which encouraged the brightest anticipations of success. But alas! these flattering reports were, to Mr. Shee, but vague and unauthoritative opinions, whose accuracy he was utterly unable to test. Of the limited circle in which the early efforts of the young student's pencil were discussed and applauded, there was probably but one person qualified in any degree, by natural taste or acquired knowledge, to form a judgment as to the real merit of these alleged miracles of art; and to him, all external nature was a blank,—all merely visible facts or phenomena were dependent for belief on extrinsic evidence.

With Mr. Shee, therefore, sensible as he was of the critical deficiencies of the friendly witnesses, their warmest panegyrics had little weight; and among his intimate friends there were not wanting those who urged upon him with much vehemence, and some plausibility, the folly of devoting the promising talents of his son to a pursuit which held out no prospect of wealth to reward the unintermitting labour it demands of its votaries, and no chances of social eminence which could be even as a feather in the golden balance by

which alone these *practical* philosophers estimated the value of all worldly distinctions.

Art was, no doubt, in those days, at a low ebb in Ireland; nor were science and literature much more influential in their effect on the tastes and habits of Irish society. Genius sprang spontaneously from the soil; but the social atmosphere was unfavourable to its culture, and its full powers were rarely developed, save through the process of transplantation in a more genial clime. Politics, indeed, and the pursuits necessarily or naturally connected with political life, formed a striking and brilliant exception to the rule. At the bar and in the senate, bad law and corrupt legislation were rescued from contempt, and screened from infamy by the dazzling halo which Irish eloquence shed around the blunders of the one, and the venality of the other; and the names of Grattan, Curran, Flood and Plunkett are ever rising up in arrest of judgment before the historian of Ireland about to pass sentence of unqualified reprobation on a period of her annals, when her courts exhibited a gross caricature of justice, and her National Council was a scene of undisguised and unblushing traffic in the votes and consciences of its members.

The forensic and parliamentary glories of that notable epoch were then in their zenith. The oligarchical *coterie* which had previously constituted the plaything legislature of Ireland, had just obtained, or were on the eve of obtaining, their short-lived independence;—that unfettered right of misgoverning their country, which, to the great advantage of the empire, they subsequently sold, after duly enjoying and abusing it for about eighteen years. Politics supplied the only theme that seriously occupied the thoughts of men, and the only

career that could stimulate their ambition or reward their exertions. In Sir Martin's own words, applied long afterwards to the state of public feeling and taste in England—

> "The Muse, desponding, strikes her lyre in vain;
> She finds no ear at leisure for the strain.
> Art's toiling sons their slighted stores unfold,
> Each eye is vacant, and each heart is cold."

But, in truth, the chords of the national lyre had, in Ireland, been long undisturbed by the touch of muse or minstrel; and scanty indeed were the stores of taste which Hibernian art could unfold to the gaze of the *dilettante* or the student.

But the ardour that impels to exertion, and the genius that qualifies for success, in the arena of literature or art, are proof against the warning calculations of finance and the allurements of mere worldly ambition. In other pursuits, the daily occupation, the nightly toil, however suited to our mental or physical capabilities, are generally but the means to an end. Rank, wealth, or power, radiant in the brilliant hues of fancy and hope, appears at the extremity of the *vista*, and sheds over the intermediate space to be traversed a light which, although often but an *ignis fatuus*, is the ray that guides and cheers us on our rugged onward path. But to the poet or the painter, fame itself is but a subordinate, his art the primary object. "*Labor ipse voluptas:*"—and though vague aspirations after renown, and dreamy glimpses of posthumous celebrity may have their effect in sustaining the enthusiasm of the student or the minstrel, it is in the cherished occupation itself that he finds the active stimulus to labour, the spirit which leads to victory, and the hope that consoles under temporary defeat.

To a vocation so decided as that which our young student felt for the art, the most plausible objections of sober worldly reasoning were not merely inconclusive, but utterly unavailing; and the very restricted range which the state of the law at that time allowed to a Catholic youth of good family, in the choice of a career, supplied an argument which could not but add some weight to his representations, in pleading the cause of his favourite pursuit.

In the mean time, and pending the discussion as to his ultimate professional destiny, he had been admitted as a pupil in an academy or school of design carried on in connexion with, and under the control of the Royal Dublin Society, an institution of some importance and utility at that period, and which continues, if I mistake not, to occupy a respectable position among the learned and scientific bodies of the United Kingdom.

The master who at that time, and for many years after, presided over the studies of the pupils in this school of design, was a Mr. Robert Lucius West, an artist of considerable ability in the elementary branches of the art, and the son and successor in office of one of the most accomplished draughtsmen in Europe, who, by some more than usually striking caprice of fortune, had ended a career of brilliant promise, in the obscure and comparatively humble position above mentioned. The elder West, a pupil of the celebrated Carl Vanloo, had acquired in his foreign tuition a degree of academic power that has been rarely, if ever, surpassed: and there are extant among his productions some chalk studies from the life which may be truly described as masterpieces of drawing, execution, and taste in that department of the pencil.

The establishment, therefore, as it existed in the

time of his son, was alike conspicuous for sound elementary principles, and rich in examples of academic excellence; and so well did our young artist profit by the opportunities of study and improvement thus afforded to him, that when, at a later period, he was admitted as a probationary student of that Royal Academy over which he was destined one day to preside, his merits as a correct and spirited draughtsman were such as to challenge the admiration not only of his fellow-students, but of the able professor who at that time directed the studies in the school of the antique at Somerset House.

To Mr. West, whose favourable report of the young pupil's progress had, no doubt, already reached the ears of his family, Mr. Shee, in his doubt and perplexity, at length resolved to apply for advice, with an earnest appeal to his candour and sincerity. He was not long kept in suspense as to that gentleman's opinion on the point submitted to him. To the anxious inquiry whether the talents exhibited by the enthusiastic student were such as to afford a reasonable hope of success in life, the answer was prompt, unhesitating, and conclusive. "Were he my own son," said Mr. West, "no consideration should induce me to thwart him in his wish to enter on a career in which he cannot fail to distinguish himself."

Encouraged by this authoritative testimony in favour of his son's genius, Mr. Shee cheerfully acquiesced in the view thus taken by the rightly-judging critic; and from that time young Martin was allowed to apply with increased ardour and diligence, to the professional studies which were to qualify him for the attainment of future eminence.

But Mr. Shee was not destined to witness even the

earliest steps of his son in that career of which he had, at length, begun to form cheering if not brilliant anticipations. A premature, though gradual, decay of the physical powers, without the appearance of any specific malady, had, for some time, been clearly observable in all his movements and actions. The symptoms of approaching dissolution now rapidly increased; and unforeseen pecuniary losses, by which his already slender means were still further reduced, preyed upon his spirits, and contributed to hasten the termination of a life marked by more than an ordinary share of earthly trials. He died on Christmas Day 1783, at the age of sixty-three, but a few days after his son Martin had completed his fourteenth year.

CHAP. II.

1784—1788.

Precarious Prospects. — Painful Discovery. — Resolute Conduct. — The First Commission. — Early Start in Life. — Rapid Success. — Professional Details. — The Blake Family. — Habits, Studies, and Amusements. — Theatricals. — Lothario, "for that night only." — Correspondence. — Determines on removing to London. — "Affair of Honour." — Preparatory Drill. — Pacific Termination. — Departure for London.

THE year 1784 opened sadly and gloomily on the prospects of the young student. The little property which, at the time of Mr. Shee's death, remained from the wreck of his fortunes, was so circumstanced as to be for the moment almost wholly unavailable for the necessities of his family; and but for the affectionate and truly maternal care of Mrs. Dillon, the position of the orphan boy would have been one of great anxiety and embarrassment. His brother, a youth of eighteen or nineteen, was indeed in a situation which, however humble and laborious, supplied the means of acquiring valuable commercial knowledge, and held out fair prospects of future advancement, which were subsequently realized. But although, to a certain extent, launched in life, with moderate prospects, and present means of existence sufficient for his personal requirements, he was not qualified either by age or pecuniary resources, to take upon himself the guardianship of his young brother's interests, to provide for his present comforts,

or assume in any degree, the guidance or regulation of his future career.

But in his aunt, Mrs. Dillon, young Martin had ever found a devoted mother; and her recent marriage had effected no change in her conduct towards him. In her undeviating kindness she was indeed freely encouraged and cheerfully seconded by her excellent husband; and after the death of Mr. Shee, it was arranged that Martin should remain an inmate of Mr. Dillon's house and family, until he should be of an age to commence the practice of his profession. His grief for the loss of his father appears to have been a deeper and more permanent feeling than is usually experienced in such cases, at an age when the future has generally too many attractions, real or delusive, to admit of that painful dwelling on the past by which the domestic afflictions of maturer life are prolonged and embittered. But in mental employment of various kinds, and, above all, in a diligent application to his professional studies, he sought and found the most effectual diversion to his sorrow. His labours at Mr. West's academy continued with unabated zeal; and not only did he carry off in turn the different silver medals which were offered as prizes for the competition of the students, but such and so unusual was his proficiency, that after he had left the schools of the institution, the Dublin Society presented him with a miniature silver palette, bearing an inscription expressive of their sense of his exemplary assiduity and distinguished merit as a draughtsman.

With increasing skill in the management of his pencil, came the gradual consciousness of ability to render it available for his support; while that sensitive independence of spirit, of which he had given such early indications, supplied a perpetual spur to his energies, in the

anxious hope that he might soon find himself in a position to relieve his relatives from the charge and care in his regard, which the unfortunate state of his father's affairs had entailed upon them.

The period to which he looked forward so eagerly was not destined to be long delayed. Its arrival was hastened by a circumstance, slight in itself, but affording in its details too strong an illustration of his character to be omitted or slurred over in the recital.

His worthy kinsman, Mr. Dillon, a man of warm and generous feelings, was not without a corresponding warmth of temper; and the devoted affection exhibited by his wife towards her favourite nephew, whose interests formed the subject of her constant solicitude, and perhaps too exclusively engrossed her thoughts, was occasionally the theme of a little conjugal remonstrance on the part of a husband pardonably jealous of his superior claims on her regard. Mr. Dillon was indeed too considerate to be betrayed into any manifestation of this feeling in his intercourse with Martin himself, towards whom his demeanour was invariably kind and affectionate, and who was consequently far from suspecting that any interruption, however slight, of the domestic harmony of those so justly dear to him could arise out of his residence under their roof. Accident, however, was the means of suddenly undeceiving him on this point.

The room which he occupied at night adjoined the bedchamber of Mr. and Mrs. Dillon; the two apartments being divided by a thin partition-wall, through which a voice raised somewhat above the ordinary pitch of conversation was inconveniently audible in the next room. One night, long after Martin had retired to rest, he was aroused from his slumbers by the sound of unusually

loud talking in the adjoining apartment; and as the voice of Mr. Dillon, in rather excited tones, reached his ear, he was startled by the frequent recurrence of his own name, in such a manner as to leave no room for doubt that he was in some way connected with the subject of what appeared to be a very animated and not perfectly amicable discussion.

Surprised and bewildered, he raised himself in bed, and listened in breathless anxiety for the confirmation of his half-dreamy impressions. He had not long to wait. As the conversation continued, it became clearly apparent that his aunt was encountering some rather petulant remonstrances on the score of her excessive partiality for himself.

Faint and sick at heart at a discovery that made him keenly sensible of his forlorn position, he felt not a moment's hesitation as to the course he should adopt. Without waiting for the approach of daylight, he rose and dressed himself as noiselessly as he could; and before any of the household were stirring, he quietly stole down stairs and left the house, with a firm resolution never to re-enter it as an inmate.

He was without money: but, young as he was, —being not more than fifteen years of age,—he could not doubt that his skill as a draughtsman was at least sufficient to obtain for him a scanty livelihood, in some employment connected with his intended profession. With this view, as soon as the increasing bustle of the streets, through which he had wandered from daybreak, gave token that the city was awaking to the business of the day, he betook himself to the shop of a neighbouring tradesman with whom he was in the habit of indulging in an occasional chat, and who had, probably, in the course of this casual gossip, obtained some knowledge

of his pursuits, if not of his circumstances. To this humble friend he now had recourse for advice; and having, with the artless simplicity of his age, and the natural frankness of his character, explained the peculiarity of his position, he requested that Mr. —— would, if possible, put him in the way of obtaining some employment for his pencil.

The worthy trader, little accustomed to act the part of a patron of the arts, but full of sympathy for the sorrows of his young friend, and anxious to exhibit his good will, expressed much regret that his opportunities of effectual service were so limited; adding, after a little hesitation, that, indeed there was a small job,—something—not *quite* in Mr. Shee's way, with which he could himself furnish him, if it were not considered too derogatory. This was neither more nor less than the restoration of the figures on the dial-plate of a large old-fashioned time-piece, which seemed to require renovation. In a true spirit of manly independence Martin at once closed with this startling offer; and it is a fact, the singularity of which may, under the circumstances, be thought to border on the ludicrous, that the first money earned by the exercise of a pencil destined in after-times to raise the young artist to the highest social and official station within the range of his professional ambition, was the sum of *ten shillings and sixpence* received in payment of his labour in painting *the figures on the face of a clock.*

It must not be supposed that in thus abruptly taking leave of Mr. Dillon's house, he left its kind and affectionate inmates for any length of time in a state of uncertainty as to his plans. Having secured a cheap lodging in the neighbourhood, he returned to his uncle's for the purpose of removing his effects, explaining the

cause of his departure, and expressing his determination to be no longer a burden on his friends. The momentary ebullition of temper to which he was indebted for his unpleasant discovery, had long passed away; and his worthy kinsman, astonished and vexed at the result of his own petulance, urged everything that kindness could suggest to dissuade the sensitive and high-spirited boy from his project of immediate independence. All remonstrance, however, was in vain. With strong expressions of gratitude for the past kindness of his uncle and aunt, and an earnest assurance of his dutiful feelings towards them, he declared that nothing should induce him to remain in a position where he might be, however unintentionally, a cause of disagreement between his nearest connexions.

As the effort to divert him from his purpose appeared a hopeless task, his friends soon came to the conclusion that it was better to acquiesce in his views, and afford him every assistance and encouragement in their power, in his attempt to establish himself at once as a portrait-painter in Dublin. They had too firm a faith in his genius, and were too proud of its precocious development, not to feel tolerably confident of its eventual success, however that success might be retarded by his extreme youth; a disadvantage more than compensated by habits of industry and self-reliance, and a general manliness of character which supplied the best qualification for early contact and conflict with the business and cares of active life.

Instead therefore of thwarting his wishes by remonstrance or opposition, Mr. and Mrs. Dillon did their utmost to facilitate his arrangements; and in a short time, aided by their advice, and, no doubt, by their pecuniary assistance, he was duly installed in suitable

apartments, and provided with a *studio* where he could receive sitters, and commence the regular practice of his profession as a portrait painter.

His first professional attempts were in crayons, a style at that time much in vogue for portraits of a head size. His terms, at starting, were, of course, very moderate; and as the accuracy of his likenesses was not less remarkable than the intrinsic merit of his pictures, he soon obtained an amount of employment beyond his expectations, and within a very short space of time found himself rapidly rising into notice and reputation as an artist.

Encouraged by the early and daily increasing patronnage bestowed upon his pencil, he soon found it advisable to look out for a more favourable *local* for the exercise of its powers; and accordingly a handsome set of apartments in Dame Street, then the most fashionable thoroughfare of Dublin, were selected for his *studio* and residence. Here his popularity continued to make rapid strides. His talents began to attract the attention of those circles whose voice was most influential in matters of criticism. Social qualities and mental acquirements, far beyond his years, combined to recommend him personally to all those with whom he was brought into professional intercourse; and before he had completed his seventeenth year, he was in full occupation and growing fame among the highest classes of the Irish metropolis.

His success in crayon-painting having been so decided, he now ventured to try his skill in oils, and soon established his claim to equal encouragement in this department of the art.

One of the first pictures in oils which he painted as a commission, was the portrait of Miss Blake, the daughter

of Mr. Blake, of Ardfry, a family of ancient descent and large estates in the county of Galway, since raised to the peerage by the title of Lord Wallscourt. This young lady, who some years later was married to the Earl of Erroll, and, after the death of that nobleman, became the wife of the Right Honourable John Hookham Frere, of diplomatic and literary celebrity, was, at the time of which I am writing, a graceful and lovely girl of seventeen; and chance could hardly have supplied a more favourable or more inspiring subject for the young artist's unpractised pencil. The picture, still extant, I believe, in the possession of Mr. Frere's family, is of the size technically, but very oddly, designated as a *half-length*, which, "being interpreted," is understood to mean a representation of the human figure from the head down to the knees or thereabouts, inclusively. The figure is attired *en amazone*, according to what, I presume, was the fashion of the day, in a riding-habit of bright scarlet cloth, with a large black Spanish hat and feather. The painting, carefully executed, and with no lack of mechanical power in the use of the materials, has something of the hardness and stiffness of style which might be anticipated in so juvenile a production; but the colouring and expression of the face are such as would have done credit to the maturer talents of the painter: and when, after an interval of more than forty years, this early work was accidentally recalled to his remembrance by Mr. Frere, and, at his earnest request, produced by that gentleman for his examination, Mr. Shee could not but view it with some complacency, as a highly creditable effort of his youthful pencil.

His introduction to the Blake family was attended by a little incident which, however trifling in itself, is

sufficiently illustrative of the singularity of his position, as a lad of sixteen, already established in public favour as an artist of some reputation, to justify its notice in this place. While engaged one day at his easel, he was informed that Lady Eleanor Blake was waiting to see him in the outer room which served as his gallery or ante-chamber. Having desired the servant to say that he would wait on her ladyship immediately, he shortly followed him into the outer room, where he found a lady of fashionable appearance busily engaged in examining the pictures and drawings arranged round the apartment. She turned on seeing him enter, and having acknowledged his bow by a corresponding salutation, very quietly resumed her study of the works around her. After a considerable pause of some embarrassment to the young artist, he ventured to inquire the object of her visit. "I wished to see Mr. Shee, sir," was the reply. "My name is Shee, madam." "Excuse me, sir, but I believe my business is with your father." "My father, madam, is, I regret to say, not living." "Dear me! there must be some mistake, I wished to see Mr. Shee the artist." "I believe, madam, that I am the only person of my name in Dublin who answers that description." A laughing apology and explanation ensued on the part of Lady Eleanor, who, at length, yielded to the conviction that the very youthful individual whom she had mistaken for a recently-emancipated school-boy, was no other than the able artist whose success in transferring to canvas the features of several of her friends and relations had induced her to seek his professional services in the portrait of one of her children.

It was not that, as in some other cases of early developed talent, a boyish or peculiarly juvenile costume,

calculated to enhance the contrast between his age and his professional maturity, had been adhered to by him after he was regularly engaged in the practice of his art. He was too straightforward and independent in spirit to deprecate criticism by urging as a claim to indulgence the plea of extreme youth. Nor would his pride have ever suffered him to covet any favourable notice of his works, save that to which, from their intrinsic merit, they might be considered as fairly entitled.

The fact is, that from an unusually early age he had submitted with punctilious precision to the exigencies of the adult *toilette*, in those days very severe: nor did the loftier cares of his professional ambition so far engross his mind, as to render him indifferent to the minor triumphs which society has in reserve for those who seek her favour and yield a cheerful obedience to her rule. In those days of voluminous neckcloths, lace ruffles, gaily-lined skirts, and *aile-de-pigeon* curls, if *dandyism* was a term as yet unknown, the spirit of which it is the outward exponent found even a readier vent and wider range than at present, in the varieties of elaborate costume which the fashions of the time afforded; and however averse individuals might be to superfluous trouble or display in these matters, even that limited acquiescence in the absurdities of custom which general example extorts from all reasonable people, involved a daily sacrifice of time and personal convenience, against which, in our more practical day, the most patient coxcombry would probably rebel.

Perhaps the heaviest tribute exacted by tyrant custom in those days, was the hard necessity from which no "man about town" was exempt, of spending from an hour to an hour and a half every morning, under the hands of the hairdresser. Apart from the

active annoyance of curling irons, hair-pins, pomatum, and maréchal powder, the daily waste of time was a grievance which could not but be keenly felt by those who were dependent on mental exertion for their chances of success or distinction in life. Many, no doubt, read or affected to read during the tedious process; but the amount of serious thought, or *bonâ-fide* study compatible with the dusty details of the operation, can hardly be estimated at any available rate; and the most persevering student seldom looked upon it in a more favourable point of view, than as affording a reasonable opportunity of trifling with the light literature of the day.

To a mind singularly active and energetic as that of our young artist, this protracted daily sacrifice to "the Graces," could not fail to be attended with some compunctious visitings. But if, as must be admitted, the cares of the toilet recommend themselves at all ages, on the ground of personal comfort and social propriety, at sixteen they generally assume the importance of an occupation, and all but challenge the dignity of a science. Some terms of compromise, therefore, were to be sought, for the quiet of his conscience; and a valuable hint from the example of the accomplished and courtly Earl of Chesterfield, enabled him to effect this desirable object.

He had seen it stated, either in the letters or the biography of that eminent person, whose ardour in the cause of mental cultivation was scarcely less conspicuous than his devotion to the external refinements of life,—that he was in the habit of employing the hours of hair-dressing in the perusal of the English poets, thus setting apart a regular and usually neglected portion of each day, for the systematic study of what was

then considered an important branch of our national literature.

It at once occurred to our youthful student, that he could not do better than follow so respectable and edifying a precedent; and he accordingly formed a resolution, which he kept with exemplary perseverance, that he would read through the entire body of classical English poetry, during the hours which he was obliged to pass under the daily operation of the *coiffeur*.

Perhaps this circumstance, trivial as it appears, exercised a material influence on his future career, by early developing the strong poetical tendencies of his mind, and gradually forming his literary taste on the purest models. The steadiness with which he performed his self-imposed task, as a duly allotted part of his daily occupation, gave a character of earnestness to the pursuit, incompatible with the desultory reading commonly bestowed on such subjects, when resorted to in occasional and uncertain intervals of leisure. The result in his case was certainly an extensive and familiar acquaintance with the works of all whose names are most gloriously identified with the poetical fame of our country, an enthusiastic appreciation of their merits, and an unswerving faith in the orthodox traditions of the muse, as traced from Spenser, Milton, Dryden and Pope, though their then recent and not unworthy successors in the last century: a faith which remained unshaken to the end,—unseduced, if not undazzled by the brilliant fallacies of Byron, and contemptuously regardless of the more flagrant heresies of the Lake and Cockney schools.

But it was not in the regions of light literature alone that he sought relief from the labours of his pencil. In spite of the numerous obstacles which the active pursuit

of his profession, and the claims of society threw in his way, he prosecuted his classical studies with regularity and diligence, ever stimulated by an ardent love of knowledge, and perhaps not less forcibly, in this instance, by an eager and sensitive anxiety to supply all that was wanting in those essential requisites of a gentleman's education, for the acquisition of which his scholastic opportunities had been so scanty and so soon withdrawn. Taught by early precept and example to look upon ignorance as the unerring mark of vulgarity, and the most mortifying badge of social inferiority, he found in his pride, no less than in his taste and habits, a powerful motive for study, and a never-failing impulse to exertion. He caught with eagerness at every chance of improving himself, on subjects of general interest among the more cultivated classes of society; and if, as was doubtless the case, the desultory nature of his studies debarred him from that critical accuracy of knowledge in minor details, which a systematic and uninterrupted course of reading can alone insure, it is no less certain that he very early acquired an extensive range of general information, classical, literary, and philosophical, which qualified him for easy colloquial intercourse with the wisest and the wittiest of his day.

In one department of knowledge, viz., Greek and Latin lore, this result may have presented fewer obstacles to its attainment in Ireland than on this side of the Channel. It is not that in the sister-country there was an absolute deficiency of scholarship, or any want of familiarity with the sense or the syntax of the ancients, as far, at least, as Latin was concerned. But then, as now, that unhappy land, among many equally inveterate social offences, was but too justly chargeable with a deplorable laxity in matters of

prosody, that provoked the derision, when it did not excite the disgust of the better taught, because more judiciously flagellated, "*Saxon*." *False quantity*,—that classical enormity, for the perpetration of which even the revered name of Edmund Burke has escaped the ridicule of posterity, only by means of the providential impulse of genius, which enabled him, with matchless presence of mind, and happy intrepidity, to wrest the ill-omened occurrence to his own favour, when he "thanked the noble lord in the blue ribbon for the opportunity of repeating" the aptly-quoted, but vilely-pronounced maxim of the Roman historian,—*false quantity* stalked in barbarous flagrancy through the arena of social debate,—"unwhipped of justice," and unrestrained by wholesome academic rigour. Misguided men, urged on by a blind and fatal confidence in their knowledge of the text and its meaning, as all-sufficient for classical salvation, rushed into quotation with an audacity nearly incomprehensible, in our day, to those—the luckless *alumni* of Scottish or continental erudition,—on whom the vigilant *surveillance* of a stern scholastic police—that formidable *rod, of which the handle is at Eton, and the* BIRCH *everywhere*,—imposes a salutary restraint, when they are tempted to display their classical attainments in general society.

In common with many of his countrymen, more distinguished for academic learning, our young painter, an all but self-taught, though earnest and enthusiastic, scholar, was, no doubt, obnoxious in some degree, to this national reproach. But if the martinets of Eton and Winchester might occasionally detect him tripping in his prosody, there were but few without the pale of professional scholarship who could boast a more extensive and available acquaintance with the literature of

ancient Rome, or a more just and intelligent appreciation of all that in poetry, eloquence, and philosophy, the Augustan Age has bequeathed to the enduring admiration of posterity.

His knowledge of Greek was more restricted; and in that branch of learning, he did not, probably, rise much beyond the average of those whose Hellenic studies, tardily commenced, and imperfectly prosecuted at school, are suddenly interrupted by the necessity of entering on the pursuits of active life, at an age when students more favoured by circumstances, are sent to develop and mature their scholastic wisdom at the University. If, when compulsory education comes to an end, the scholar is still dependent on his grammar and lexicon, for his intelligent intercourse with Homer and Euripides, it may be generally assumed that his subsequent efforts to cultivate the acquaintance of those revered ancients will be feeble and unsatisfactory.

The general standard of erudition in our day, is probably higher, on this point, than it was seventy years ago. But, be that as it may, Sir Martin could not claim credit among his contemporaries for more than a *decent competency* of knowledge in Greek; while his attainments as a Latinist were held in high respect and estimation by some of the most distinguished classical scholars of his time.

At this period of his career, the distribution of his day must have been regulated with no little amount of system and judgment, and with a vigilant eye to the *utilisation* of the stray half hours which, intervening between the calls of distinct occupations, are so often wasted in loitering inactivity. He could not otherwise have found time for the many different pursuits to which he sedulously applied himself in his hours of

leisure and recreation, without neglecting those opportunities of social amusement which his personal popularity abundantly supplied. To those who judge merely from the altered habits of our day, and are ignorant of the estimation in which the drama and its interests were held among the learned and polite of that remote period, at least in the capital of the sister kingdom, it may appear a rather startling fact that he was a very frequent attendant at the theatre — a statement which to many would convey the idea of habitual idleness and dissipation. Nothing, however, could be more erroneous than such an estimate of his habits in reference to the practice in question.

The stage, at the period, and in the locality to which this narrative now refers, was not, as at present, condemned to alternate between gorgeous but unmeaning *spectacle*, and extravagant buffoonery, as the surest means of attracting the attention of an audience much preoccupied with graver subjects of public interest, and ill-trained to theatrical criticism. The masterpieces of Shakspeare — the vigorous productions of Rowe, Congreve, and Otway,—the sparkling and characteristic comedies of that dramatic school which may perhaps be said to have commenced with Wycherley, and which too certainly expired with Sheridan,—formed the available and ever attractive *repertoire* of a theatre which had not yet abandoned the effort

"To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature."

Paltry, no doubt, as compared with the wonders of the modern stage, were the scenic effects attempted by the most spirited management; and ludicrous enough was the incongruity of dramatic costume, even after the good taste and classical feeling of the Kembles had

rescued Macbeth from his guardsman's regimentals and full-bottomed wig, and emancipated Cleopatra from her hoop and ostrich feathers. But although Belvidera still raved in powder and court lappets, and many other strange anachronisms continued to offend the critical eye of the spectator learned in the historic records of the toilet, the more important ends of the drama were better kept in view, and audiences entered with a far more artistic feeling into the business of the scene, than in our day. At that period, also, the general dinner hour was not so late as to be inconveniently interfered with by the arrangement of a party to the theatre, the performances were not protracted to an inordinate length, and the injudicious multiplication of private boxes had not afforded to the fine and the fastidious, a plausible excuse for shunning the democratic and levelling publicity of the dress-circle. In short, the "legitimate drama" ranked among the orthodox amusements of the aristocratic world; and a certain familiarity with theatrical literature and the dramatic gossip of the day, formed an important, not to say essential, part of the social education of a gentleman.

By no class of society in Dublin, was this doctrine more conscientiously held, or more religiously carried into practice, than by the students of the University: a body among whom Mr. Shee reckoned many intimate friends and associates. It was probably to the green-room associations of some of these critical *alumni* of the "Silent Sister," that he was indebted for a place on the free list of the theatre, in Smock Alley,—then, I believe, the principal place of theatrical entertainment in Dublin. However satisfactory may have been his success, and however encouraging his prospects as an artist, at this early period of his career, it is difficult to

believe that the privilege in question was spontaneously offered to him at the age of sixteen, as a respectful homage to his social and professional distinction, in the same spirit in which a similar compliment was paid to him, some twenty years later, by Mr. Harris, the lessee or proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre. That he was "free" of one of the "houses" (Dublin at that time boasted of two), is, however, certain; and this facility of access will account for and, I trust, *palliate* the fact of his frequent indulgence in the most fascinating of all intellectual amusements.

The Dublin stage was, at that period, in considerable repute, even among English theatrical critics, as a kind of nursery for dramatic talent; many of the most distinguished ornaments of the British drama having won their first histrionic laurels on the Dublin boards: and when the "stars" of Old Drury and Covent Garden made the recess of the London season available for the extension of their provincial fame, it was in Dublin, above all other places, that they could most securely reckon on audience "fit," and *not* "*few*," to re-echo with equal discrimination and more vociferous enthusiasm, the plaudits of their metropolitan admirers.

In those days, indeed, the capital of the sister kingdom could not properly be classed among provincial cities, being, as it was, the seat of an independent legislature, composed of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons of Ireland in Parliament assembled, and the residence of a court which, however vicarious in its nature, emulated, not unsuccessfully, the splendours, and caricatured the *étiquette* of St. James's. On a smaller scale, Dublin exhibited every variety of social grade and pursuit which was to be found in London; and the proportion of "*gens desœuvrés*," recognising the

empire of fashion, and making amusement the elaborate occupation of their existence, was, to say the least of it, not to be rated at a lower percentage than in the British metropolis. In such a state of society, the demand for dramatic excitement would naturally be regular enough to insure a constant supply of respectable mediocrity, if not of first-rate talent; and when the more imaginative character of the national temperament is taken into consideration, it will be no matter of surprise that, in those days, the drama should have enjoyed in Ireland a larger share of the notice of *the world*, than on this side of the Channel.

That the frequent opportunities thus enjoyed by Mr. Shee, of witnessing the performance of the best plays in the language, may have given an impulse to his studies in the department of dramatic literature, is highly probable; but his experience of the green-room and the stage-box was certainly not productive of any permanent love for theatrical entertainments, which during the far greater part of his life, had, practically, but slender attractions for him; though he felt much respect for histrionic talent of a high order, and fully appreciated the claims of the most eminent actors who flourished during his youth. At the early stage of his career, however, to which I now refer, he would appear to have had not only some feeling for the dramatic art, but some pretensions as an amateur performer, if we may judge by a slight incident, the date of which is included in the period in question, and which exhibits him, "*for that night only*," as an ambitious though rather unfortunate votary of the buskin.

There was at that time in Dublin, an academy or scholastic establishment of some reputation, where young men were prepared for the University, and which

was presided over by a certain Doctor Ball, among whose pupils Mr. Shee reckoned some intimate friends. It must be presumed that this worthy pedagogue was an ardent admirer of the drama, and entertained the very questionable theory that it was expedient to develop a taste for theatricals in the minds of his "*studiosa juventus.*" It is, at any rate, certain that some time in the early part of the year 1787, his pupils determined on giving, under his auspices and direction, a semi-public amateur performance of Rowe's tragedy of the "Fair Penitent."

A small theatre, well suited for the purpose, and furnished with proper scenic requirements, was hired for the occasion; and all due arrangements were made to secure a creditable *mise-en-scène*, and a favourable audience.

To the rigid moralists who grieve over the classical improprieties of Terence, as annually recited by the ingenuous youth of Westminster School, before applauding bishops and judges, in the time-honoured dormitory of that venerable seat of learning,—the selection, or approval, of Rowe's powerfully-written but grossly indelicate play, for performance by these juvenile amateurs, may appear a rather objectionable proceeding on the part of their "guide, philosopher, and friend;" and it must be admitted that the genuine Saxon text of that celebrated tragedy is calculated to try the skill, if not to repay the labours, of a Bowdler, quite as effectually as the unsophisticated Latin of the Roman dramatist. But as, in the one case, the reverential enthusiasm of the scholar overcomes the scruples of the divine and the precisian, so, in the other, the brilliant traditions of dramatic success shed round the masterpiece of Rowe's talent, a refining and daz-

zling halo that softened all defects to the moral perception, and brought out the sterling beauties of the piece in strong and bold relief. Above all, at that time, the genius of a Siddons was inseparably associated in the public mind, with the sorrows of the frail, and—in spite of the title—not very *penitent* Calista; and it was, perhaps, owing chiefly to that circumstance, that the play in question, with all its imperfections, ranked among the most popular and attractive inspirations of the tragic muse.

The *dramatis personæ*, including the part of Calista, undertaken by a slight and rather *lady-like* young gentleman, were, with one exception, distributed among Dr. Ball's pupils. But the *rôle* of "the haughty, gallant, gay Lothario," in one sense, the hero of the piece, was offered to Mr. Shee, although he was wholly unconnected with the establishment which supplied the remainder of the *corps dramatique:* a compliment from which it seems fair to infer that he enjoyed some reputation for dramatic talent among his friends in that little community.

The momentous evening arrived; the curtain rose, and the performance commenced and proceeded with much dramatic propriety, and reasonable success, until the duel scene in the fourth act, where Lothario is mortally wounded by the injured husband, Altamont. In this case, it is probable that neither of the combatants was very "cunning of fence," or much skilled in the conduct of dramatic rencounters. But, be that as it may, in the midst of the *assaut*, the button broke short off the end of Altamont's stage sword, the jagged point of which glanced suddenly up and entered the *mouth* of poor Lothario, inflicting a sharp and painful wound in his palate.

He fell, in obedience to the prompter's book, and delivered Lothario's dying speech, as emphatically as a mouth filling with blood, and a sense of intolerable pain would allow; and when the attendants proceeded to carry him off in his character of a dead man, they found, on leaving the stage, that he had fully entered into the spirit of his part, having fainted from pain and excitement.

The injury he had sustained proved, however, to be of a trifling nature; and after a few days' inconvenience and discomfort, no trace remained of his wound.

Circumstantial evidence fixes the date of this occurrence at a period not later than the beginning of the year 1787, when he had just completed his seventeenth year; and as the performance in question, in spite of the unskilful swordsmanship, which had escaped the notice of the audience, was attended with some little social *éclat*, it is perhaps no small evidence of the steady good sense that characterised his conduct from the first, that his dramatic triumph had not the effect of inoculating him with a taste for private theatricals,—to so many, a captivating and disastrous amusement. As far as can be ascertained, it was the only instance of his treading "the boards;" and it may at least be confidently asserted that it was the only occasion on which he ever *played the part of Lothario*, either *on* or *off* the stage.

As may well be supposed, the records of his epistolary correspondence at this period are not very abundant. But an extract or two from a few letters written by him in the latter part of 1786 and the early part of 1787, will perhaps not be devoid of interest, as illustrative of his pursuits, feelings and position, at this stage of his career.

The friend to whom these letters were addressed was

a Mr. Nugent, a young student of the art, between whom and Mr. Shee an intimate acquaintance had sprung up, in consequence of their occupying apartments in the same house, but who, at the period during which the letters in question were addressed to him was, it would appear, absent from Dublin.

"Friday, November 3, 1786.

"The annals of painting don't furnish much news. The town has not yet filled; and, of course, the artists are not very busy. Stoker has done some pictures for Latouche's family, two of which are extremely well. . . . I have painted but two portraits of the lucrative kind since my last letter; but to console me, they tell me I am to be very busy this winter. The ardour of my expectations has been so repeatedly damped by disappointment, that, should the land of promise appear ever so near or pleasing to the view, I shall not give credit to my senses till I find myself in the centre of it.* I dined on St. Luke's day with the artists at the Eagle Tavern, in Eustace Street. We had everything in the most elegant style you can conceive. 'Twas in fact as pleasant an entertainment as ever I was at; and the gentility of the company far surpassed my expectations. . . . . .

"Rogers called on me this morning. He is just returned from London, and has given me a minute description of a capital picture painted by Copley.† The subject is the death of Major Pearson, who was killed while bravely defending the island of Jersey on an attack made by the French during the late war. He says it is considered one of the finest pictures ever painted in that way. . . . . I have painted a portrait of Dr. Lyster's son, which is very much

* When it is remembered that the writer of this desponding sentiment *had not as yet completed his seventeenth year* (having been born on the 20th December, 1769), there seems something almost ludicrous in the tone of the complaint.

† John Singleton Copley, R.A., the celebrated historical painter, father of Lord Lyndhurst.

approved of. They think it will be serviceable to me with the Society.* I dined there on All Saints' Eve among a very large and elegant company. They seem very much inclined to serve me, and, I believe, are very well able to do so. Blake has come to town with all his family. They will want some pictures. His son sits to me to-morrow for an oil picture as large as life. He is married to a daughter of Lord Louth's, who is also to sit for me, I believe."

The letter from which the following extracts are taken has no date except the words "Saturday Morning." But it is evident from the context that it was written a short time after the foregoing one.

"I shall begin by communicating a piece of intelligence which I flatter myself will afford you some degree of satisfaction. I am, at present, very busy, and have a prospect of continuing so. I have finished young Blake, and have on hand four portraits more of the same family. One, which I have begun this day, is to be a half-length, as large as life, in oil, of a most beautiful girl, Miss Blake. The rest are to be heads. I expect to have Sir William Newcomen's daughter to sit to me next week, through the means of my friend, Braughall. I have finished three portraits of Mr., Mrs. and Master Lyster, which have been seen and approved of by the Society; one of which (Colonel Burton Cunningham) has promised to patronise me. He is a man every way capable of being serviceable to a young artist, has great influence at the Castle, and opinion is looked upon as the standard of taste and judgment. Mrs. Blake told me to-day that she spoke to a person intimate at the Castle who has promised to bring the Duchess† to look at the pictures. However, I do not suffer myself to be elated at distant prospects, be they ever so flattering; as I know from experience how often they vanish from our view,

* The Dublin Society, the institution mentioned in the preceding chapter.

† The beautiful Duchess of Rutland, wife of Charles, fourth Duke of Rutland, at that time Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

and that, at the time when perhaps we imagine ourselves beyond the danger of disappointment. . . . . .

"My aunt is perfectly recovered, and thanks you much for your kind inquiries. She has got a daughter which I wish I could transform into a son* for their satisfaction. A foreigner to arrive in Dublin at present would (if he was ignorant of the Princess Amelia's death) certainly imagine there had been a dreadful pestilence here lately, from the number of sable gentry he would meet. The whole town is in mourning as black as jet. 'Twill last six weeks."

A few weeks later, he writes as follows:—

"I am at present as busy as any one with only one head and two hands can possibly be. . . . . I have pictures on hand to the amount of more than fifty guineas — a circumstance which has very much assisted towards dissipating more than fifty rather disagreeable reflections. Most of them are in oil colours, which I am very glad of; as I should be sorry to forget what little I know of that style of painting. I am also to receive a silver palette from the Dublin Society, in token of their approbation of my pictures. That part of their proceedings which relates to me I will enclose for your perusal. I have some expectations of painting a picture of the beautiful Mrs. Stratford.† She called here yesterday; but the elements seemed combined against suffering her to come up stairs; for it rained and blew so hard that with any regard either to decency or safety, she could not have come out of the carriage. I think, without being guilty of egotism in a very great degree, I cannot decently waste any more of my paper about myself. . . . . Now for the theatre, every intelligence concerning which you will allow me suffi-

* Sir Martin's amiable relative (still living), to whose birth this passage refers, has perhaps some reason to re-echo the wish here expressed; as had she been a male, she would, on the death of her kinsman, the late Lord Roscommon, have inherited that ancient earldom, now extinct, by reason of the total failure of the male line in that branch of the Dillon family.

† The Honourable Mrs. Stratford, afterwards better known in England as the witty and eccentric Countess of Aldborough.

ciently qualified to communicate, when I tell you I have been at the play almost four times a week ever since the house opened; and that, too, in the boxes; so that I look up (not with a great deal of envy, you may be sure) to my quondam place of exaltation in the hay-loft, as if I had never sat in council with the gods in my life. However, when the benefits come on, I fear I shall be glad to re-assume my seat at the board, and resign my seat in the lower house, to some one who will pay better for it. Nay, think of the sacrifice I make you to-night, since to write to you, I have refused going to see Mr. Daly* assassinate poor Werter from the stage-box. But, *à-propos*, since I have mentioned it, take my opinion of it both as to the play itself and the actors of it. To begin then with the principal character, Werter, Mr. Daly, though many degrees removed from excellence, is, in my opinion, passable, and much better than you would expect. . . . . The play itself has nothing to recommend it, either in incident, language, or moral. . . . . The house was very much crowded the night I saw it, but I am sure it will not continue so long. Novelty and the popularity of the original story may sustain it for some time; but a piece with so little real merit must soon sink into merited oblivion. I was present lately at the representation of Macklin's comedy, called "The Man of the World," and was very well entertained. . . . . After the play was Jephson's farce of "The Hotel; or, the Servant with two Masters." O'Reilly, as usual, far beyond description great. Jephson himself was in the boxes mightily pleased at seeing his piece so well acted. After the [per ormance] I had the honour (great you will say it was) of supping with his Majesty of Smock Alley. The company were Mr. and Mrs. Daly, Mr. and Mrs. Lyster, Dr. H—, Mr. Higgins, Mr. Kennedy, and your humble servant. Daly is a very polite agreeable man, and very elegant in his manners."

The "Jephson" mentioned in the foregoing letter was a Captain Jephson, who at that time held a very high

* The manager of the theatre in Smock Alley. An actor of some reputation in his day.

office at the Viceregal Court (Master of the Horse, if I mistake not,) and who, in the literary world, had attained some distinction as a dramatic writer, more especially by his tragedy of "The Count de Narbonne," a work of considerable talent, which enjoyed a brilliant, if not a lasting, popularity with the theatrical critics of his day.

This gentleman was one of the earliest and warmest friends whom Mr Shee's professional and social merits had won for him among the influential members of society in Dublin. He was a man of cultivated mind and distinguished manners, whose companionship could not fail to be advantageous to a young man brought at so early an age into active and social contact with the world, its duties, its dangers, and its trials. It is certain that the name of Jephson was one of those which in after years appeared to be most agreeably associated with Sir Martin's reminiscences of his Dublin life; and he ever spoke with cordial and grateful remembrance, of the kindness he had experienced from his courtly friend, and the amiable and engaging qualities for which he was conspicuous.

It is highly characteristic of the strength of mind and firmness of principle which distinguished the late President throughout his long life, that, at this early period of his career, while studying successfully to regulate his manners by the highest standard of social propriety which the circles of Dublin afforded, he manfully resisted the influence of that same social example, wherever (as was too often the case) it sanctioned a departure from the strict rules of morality and virtue. Gay and convivial as he was in disposition, and living at a period when *moderate men*, at least according to the Hibernian interpretation of the epithet, reckoned

their daily after-dinner potations by the bottle, neither the contagion of what was called good-fellowship, nor the more formidable power of ridicule, was ever known to betray him into excess. Affectionate by nature, and enthusiastic by temperament, — ardent in his worship of beauty, and devotedly attached to the society of the fair sex, he never allowed his feelings or his imagination to obscure his moral perceptions, or blind him to the nature and consequences of vice. It is not too much to assert, that from the moment when, at an age scarcely removed from childhood, he became the uncontrolled master of his own actions, neither the allurements of pleasure, the force of authoritative example, nor the specious suggestions of a worldly but decorous philosophy, could ever prevail on him to adopt, or acquiesce in, any proceeding or line of conduct that he felt or believed to be reprehensible in a moral point of view.

In his early developed taste for intellectual and refined pleasures, he found indeed an effective safeguard against the attractions of vulgar dissipation. His love of reading amounted almost to a passion; and it extended, with a truly catholic spirit, to every department of literature.

Independently of the thirst for knowledge, which communicated a powerful impulse to his severer studies, books were, to him, literally *necessaries of life;* and he had the art,—a kind of moral or intellectual alchemy,— to derive some amount of instruction and amusement from the heaviest and most unpromising materials that fell in his way.

His early taste for music, and active study of the violin under circumstances rather unfavourable as to *locality*, have been already mentioned. In the midst of more serious occupation, and the daily increasing obsta-

cles arising from professional and social engagements, he still contrived to find time for the cultivation of his musical talents; and it would appear that his ardour in the cause had but little abated: for it was his common practice, at the period of which I am now writing, to devote an hour or two every night to his *cremona*, after the labours and amusements of the day had been brought to a close. But as it not unfrequently happened that all prior claims on his time were not completely disposed of until the near approach of midnight, his energetic contests with the crabbed score of Yanowitz or Giarnovichi were often protracted far into the "small hours" of the morning, to the serious discomfort of the less gifted and more drowsy inhabitants of the house in which he occupied the principal apartments. For some time, the exemplary patience of the complaisant landlord was a match for the perseverance of the enthusiastic *amateur*. But there are limits to all human endurance; and, at length, the long-suffering Mr. Allen, and his afflicted household, ventured to bring the subject of their broken slumbers and catgut-haunted dreams, in humble but forcible remonstrance, to the notice of the unconscious disturber of their rest. Too reasonable to persist in the infliction of so much annoyance, but too much bent on rivalling Tartini to give up his midnight practice, he resolved on a compromise, and contrived to reconcile the nocturnal quiet of his neighbours with the free exercise of his indefatigable *bow-arm*, by adopting the expedient of a *mute*.

It is a matter of regret that there is no distinct record existing, in the form of journal, memorandum-book, or correspondence, of his progress in art from the early part of the year 1787 down to the period of his departure for London in July 1788. There is no doubt,

however, that his popularity as an artist continued to increase; and his pencil found ample occupation among the most conspicuous and influential of those who formed the society of Dublin. But although his position was so far satisfactory, and the emoluments of his profession, exercised as it was within the restricted limits, and at the very moderate prices to which he thought it prudent to confine himself, were sufficient for his youthful wants and wishes, his expanding powers, and instinctive feeling for art in its highest development, rendered him painfully conscious of deficiencies that time and severe study in the midst of safer models for imitation, and brighter examples of excellence, could alone supply. The feeling which, in spite of his natural modesty and a tendency to self-depreciation, as sincere as it was unusual, could not but at times force itself on his conviction,—that at seventeen years of age he was superior in talent and artistic skill to the few professors of his art in Dublin, all greatly his seniors, who had any pretensions to rival him in public favour,—was less calculated to impress a mind like his with exaggerated notions of his own claims, than to arouse him to a sense of the low standard of merit to which he was indebted for that singular pre-eminence. Once fully alive to the professional imbecility of those around him, he was not long in adopting this mortifying but salutary view of his own position; and from that moment the necessity of removal to a more genial atmosphere of art, was the dominant idea of his existence. Amid these reasonable and practical reflections, there would no doubt occasionally mingle a prouder thought, suggesting that he was born for a higher purpose than to "blush unseen" among the artistic obscurities of Dublin, and "waste his sweetness on the desert

air" of his native land. But the anxious desire for improvement, and the vigorous resolve to "deserve," at least, if he could not "command, success," supplied the most effective impulse to his wish for a wider and freer stage of action.

The acquaintance he formed with an American painter of some reputation, who visited Dublin about this period, was not without its influence in deciding him as to the course he ought to pursue. The artist in question was Gilbert Stuart, whose works had procured for him some favourable notice in London, although not sufficient to convince him of the expediency of settling in the English capital. He was unquestionably a portrait painter of considerable merit, and, according to contemporary report, an agreeable and gentlemanlike man. He has, moreover, what may be described as a collateral claim on the respect of posterity, in the fact that he was the uncle of that clever artist and accomplished man, the late Gilbert Stuart Newton, R.A., by whose premature and lamented death the Royal Academy of England and the pictorial fame of the United States of America alike sustained a severe loss.

It is doubtful whether Mr. Stuart's visit to Dublin, at the period in question, was not connected with a design of establishing himself professionally in that minor metropolis. But whatever may have been his estimate of the chances of success which a residence in Dublin might afford in his own case, it is certain that while professing a high degree of admiration for the talent displayed in Mr. Shee's pictures, Mr. Stuart endeavoured strongly to impress on him the danger of wasting the most important period of his youth, under circumstances unfavourable alike to the just appreciation and the full development of his powers. Pre-

dictions of rapid and brilliant success in London lent their seductive aid to a line of reasoning by which the experienced counsellor did perhaps little more than confirm the foregone conclusions of his young and ambitious disciple. And thus strengthened in the opinion which his own mature reflections had spontaneously suggested, Mr. Shee discarded from his mind all doubt and hesitation on the point; thenceforth only solicitous to effect with as little delay as possible, the accomplishment of an object which he deemed essential to his chance of ultimate success in life. London was the only place where his exertions could have fair play: and to London he was resolved to go.

In our day, such a determination, natural enough in itself, does not seem to involve much energy in its adoption, or much difficulty in its performance. But the space that practically divided Dublin from London seventy-two years ago, cannot be estimated by the geographical calculation of distance between them which, in this age of steam and electric telegraphs, exhibits for all purposes of social and political communication, so convenient a proximity. London was, at that time, to the good people of Dublin, a far less familiar resort than Paris to the modern Londoner; and, although the splendours and glories of the great metropolis, courtly, parliamentary, and statistical, were ever topics of interest, and sometimes, perhaps, objects of envy, to the inhabitants of the Hibernian microcosm, yet the mass of society, high as well as low, felt, and acquiesced naturally in the *dispensation*, that Ireland was *their home*, and "little Dublin" their *head-quarters;* and on this assumption, their hopes of worldly prosperity, their projects of professional exertion, their views of political

ambition or domestic happiness, were formed, debated, and (if ever) achieved.

It was therefore but natural that the partial friends and connections, who were anticipating for their favourite a long and bright career of fame and fortune in his native city, should feel equal surprise and dismay at the announcement of a plan calculated to render nugatory all the efforts hitherto successfully made to obtain the favour of a public with whom he was daily increasing in estimation. To desert a friendly and aristocratic *clientelle* in Dublin, for the vague chance of making his way, unaided and unknown, among the more formidable crowd of competitors with which the art in London must necessarily be encumbered, was, they argued, to throw away his cards, without pretext or excuse, when the game appeared to be in his hands; it was to abandon the vantage-ground of local popularity for the hazardous path of obscure and unnoticed exertion. Loud and long were the remonstrances to which he was doomed to listen on this subject, from that practical worldly wisdom whose reasoning is unanswerable wherever its peculiar view of social or moral expediency is assumed or admitted as an essential element of the discussion. But where, as in this case, there is so wide a divergence of views, at the starting-point of the argument, conviction, on either side, is a hopeless result, and logical demonstration an impossibility.

If, however, his project of removal to London was received with disapprobation by the majority of those who were most deeply interested in his welfare, there were some among his professional patrons, who formed a juster estimate of his requirements, and thought far more favourably of his chances of success on this side

of the Channel. From several of his Dublin acquaintances, who had friends or connections in high places in England, he had the assurance of strong personal and professional recommendations, which could not fail, it was supposed, to clear away the obstructions in his path, and throw open for him the avenues of fortune.

Among these more sanguine friends and counsellors was General Robert Cuninghame, afterwards Lord Rossmore*, a conspicuous member of the Irish House of Commons, as it would appear, by the fact, casually noticed in some of Mr. Shee's early letters from London, that he was one of the commissioners deputed by the Irish Parliament to discuss with the British legislature the question of the regency, on the occasion of the king's temporary mental alienation in the latter part of the year 1788. A brother of this gentleman, General James Cuninghame, was, or was reputed to be, high in the favour of his Majesty, to whose household or personal staff he was, if I mistake not, attached, in the character either of equerry or *aide-de-camp;* and through his means, the Irish general, Robert, who took a warm interest in the fortunes of the young artist, was very confident of being able to secure for him the notice and patronage of the Court of St. James's.

The advice and cheering predictions of such friends, whose high worldly position and personal knowledge of London society, gave an important sanction to the results of their experience and the suggestions of their

* The Irish barony of Rossmore was in the year 1796 conferred on General Robert Cuninghame, with a reversionary clause in the patent of creation, under which (his lordship having died without heirs-male of his body) the peerage devolved on the son of his sister, Mrs. Westenra, by whose descendants it is now enjoyed.

judgment, far more than counterbalanced the objections by which his design was met, however strong might be their claims to respect, on account of the affectionate solicitude from which they proceeded. Still, the contemplated step was one full of risk, the existence of which could not be disguised, and involving a heavy immediate expense, which he might well fear to encounter, unless he could feel confident that his success in London would be sufficiently rapid and decided, to compensate the formidable outlay required for his removal thither.

Cautious and desponding by temperament, he was very far from entertaining so comfortable an assurance of the result of the hazardous experiment; but his conviction that the effort must be made, was too strong to be shaken by the most gloomy forebodings of failure, whether proceeding from the matter-of-fact calculations of unimaginative friends, or suggested by his own hardly more sanguine feelings.

Having once made up his mind on the subject, he deferred the execution of his design only until he could reconcile his nearest connections to a project which they viewed with so much hostility.

Meanwhile the anxiety consequent on this state of suspense soon told upon his spirits; and looking upon every day that passed over his head as so much time lost to his chances of improvement, and hopes of fame, he fell into a state of depression and despondency which neither serious occupation nor amusement could favourably affect. At length, his earnest advocacy of the course he wished to pursue, and the conviction that against wishes so strongly developed all opposition must in the end prove fruitless, extorted from his relatives a reluctant acquiescence in his proposed removal

to London; and before midsummer 1788, he had fully completed his arrangements for the important step on which so much depended.

The records of his professional career during the previous eighteen months are, as we have seen, but scanty; nor do the ascertained particulars of his social life during the same period, afford more abundant materials for narration. That he had full occupation for his pencil, and was much in society while he remained in Dublin, is beyond a doubt; and had he persevered in the laudable practice of writing a journal, which he commenced with much resolution, and carried on with great energy, for a short time, when in his seventeenth year, that document would probably have supplied some interesting records of his intellectual progress, as well as the details of professional and social successes rarely achieved at so early an age, and in that point of view, possessing perhaps some claims on the notice of the reader. But his plan of recording, with daily regularity, the passing incidents of his life, was soon and abruptly abandoned; as appears by a portly volume, evidently destined to the purpose in question, which has been preserved from that period, and in which a vast array of blank leaves, at the end of a very few closely-written and gravely autobiographical pages, bears rather ludicrous testimony to the futility of the writer's virtuous resolves in undertaking this self-imposed task.

What is still more to be regretted, however, is the want of some list or memorandum of the works which he executed during this early and, in many respects, particularly interesting stage of his progress as an artist; the social changes consequent on the great length of time which has elapsed since he left his

native country, never to return, rendering it a hopeless task to seek for local information on the subject, where no one remains of all who witnessed his youthful efforts, and where some amount of active genealogical research would be requisite to ascertain the descendants of those friends to whom he was first indebted for encouragement in his profession.

The greater part of his Dublin pictures were, it must be remembered, in crayons, and, consequently, of a more perishable nature than the oil paintings of his maturer years; and the original owners of these early productions had probably, at the time, little inducement to put on record the biographical or personal details connected with the execution of works to which they may not, perhaps, have attached great importance, not foreseeing that the future distinction of the artist would, in the fulness of time, invest them with a retrospective interest.

Before we take leave of Mr. Shee's Dublin life, it may be proper to notice an incident connected with that period which is not without interest, as exhibiting some features both personally and nationally characteristic. This was an "affair of honour," in which he was engaged at the early age of seventeen.

He was one day walking with two friends in St. Stephen's Green, which was, in those days, to the good people of Dublin, very much what the Mall in St. James's Park was to the Londoners of the same period, viz., a favourite afternoon or evening *promenade*. As they were sauntering along the rather crowded walk, they met another party of three gentlemen, one of whom, as he passed close to Mr. Shee, pushed rudely against him, and trod roughly on his foot.

Believing the occurrence to be purely accidental, on

the part of one who was a perfect stranger to him, Mr. Shee thought it unnecessary to resent or notice what he considered as the result of mere awkwardness or stupidity. But when, on their next meeting in the walk, the offence was repeated, with additional violence and evident design, the affair assumed a different colour, and the feelings of the injured party underwent a corresponding change. He broke away from his friends, and rapidly following the other *trio*, as they proceeded leisurely in their walk, challenged the attention of his assailant by a gentle tap on the shoulder; and, on that individual turning round in obedience to the summons, Mr. Shee dealt him a smart blow across the face with a light cane which he carried in his hand. A kind of *fracas* ensued; cards were exchanged; and the friends on both sides having immediately interfered, the hostile parties were separated, without any satisfactory or intelligible explanation as to the cause of so wanton and wholly unprovoked an outrage on the part of the stranger. On reference to his card, he proved to be a Mr. O'Bryen, a student of Trinity College. Neither the local habitation nor the name could throw any light on the subject; but whatever might have been the cause of the insult, the demand for "satisfaction" was, under the circumstances, and according to the notions of the time and the country, a matter of course.

Accordingly Mr. Shee without delay secured the services of a "friend," himself a student of the college, (for the "silent sister," as became an Irish university at that *fire-eating* period, was, in its discipline, amiably indulgent to the bellicose habits and propensities of its *alumni*), and despatched the appropriate "message," big with the formidable alternative of a meeting with

pistols, at twelve paces, in the "Phœnix," or an ample and *public* apology.

In the mean time, while these pleasant preliminaries were in process of adjustment, Mr. Shee betook himself to the counsels of an experienced adviser,—a gentleman of much theoretical and practical knowledge in the noble science of *duelling*,—from whom he requested a few available hints as to his deportment on the "ground," and his manual exercise with "*the marking irons*," as the appropriate weapons were fancifully and jocularly termed. The particulars of his interview with this learned canonist of chivalry, whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, were often, in subsequent years, referred to by Sir Martin, with much retrospective amusement, as strikingly illustrative of the ideas and habits of the period. At that day, the practice of simultaneously firing, latterly, I believe, invariably adopted in the conduct of hostile meetings (now, happily, of very rare occurrence), was by no means a matter of course. The notion of an "exchange of shots" often implied the necessity of each of the belligerent parties standing quietly to be shot at in his turn. It was in reference to this common contingency, that the position and attitude of the duellist, while enacting *target*, became a matter of serious and legitimate consideration. On the occasion in question, Mr. Shee's friendly and skilful professor "put him up," as the phrase went, by way of rehearsal, and instructed him to stand, *edgeways*, with his right side towards his antagonist, guarding his *head* with his pistol *held perpendicularly close to his face*, and protecting his *right side* with the *left hand*, brought round and placed on the right hip, close to the elbow of the pistol arm. This edifying private drill was accompanied by the consola-

tory assurance, that if these instructions were strictly adhered to, there would not be more than *six inches square* of the surface exposed to the hostile bullet, in which a *mortal wound* could be inflicted.

It may fairly be doubted whether the anatomical learning of the worthy instructor was as accurate as his knowledge of the warlike details appropriate to affairs of honour. But, fortunately, his youthful disciple was not destined, on this occasion, to put the soundness of either theory to any practical test. In due time, the friend whom he had despatched on his formidable errand returned with the assurance on the part of the expected antagonist, Mr. O'Bryen, that his conduct had been the result of a mistake; that he had no ground of quarrel with Mr. Shee, and no wish to offend him; the assault in question having been intended for the benefit of a Mr. King, a comedian, to whom, it must be presumed, Mr. Shee bore some resemblance, and against whom Mr. O'Bryen had, or considered himself to have, some cause of deadly animosity. It was further stated that Mr. O'Bryen, and the friend to whom he had intrusted his share of the negotiation, were willing that the most ample apology should be offered to Mr. Shee, for the unprovoked and unintentional insult he had received.

This, although, so far, satisfactory, was far short of technical "*satisfaction.*" The insult, inflicted in a public promenade, and in the midst of a numerous concourse of people, required, or at least justified the demand that the atonement should be equally public. It was therefore stipulated and insisted upon by Mr. Shee and his friend, that Mr. O'Bryen should attend with his second in Stephen's Green at the hour of the afternoon promenade, that he should there meet Mr.

Shee, accompanied by such of his friends as he might deem proper to summon on the solemn occasion, and that, then and there, the apology should be made by Mr. O'Bryen, who was simultaneously to place a stick or cane in the right hand of his antagonist, as significant of the species of reprisals to which, according to the code of "honour," he was strictly entitled; it being, of course, well understood that he was not to "improve" the opportunity, either by deed or gesture, to the detriment or annoyance of the apologising party. After some further negotiation, these terms, albeit rather unpalatable, were agreed to by Mr. O'Bryen and his friend: but this concession having been obtained, and the rights of the offending party fairly vindicated by the assertion of the principle, Mr. Shee spontaneously waived the publicity of the demonstration, and merely required that the ceremony above described should take place at his own rooms, in the presence of a few select friends. The affair was therefore finally arranged and concluded on the footing of this less humiliating expiation; and all due forms having been strictly complied with, the parties shook hands, and so the matter ended.

It is perhaps not unworthy of notice that the meeting in question was of a doubly pacificatory character; as it afforded an opportunity, of which the parties availed themselves, for a reconciliation between the respective *seconds*, who, having been, as fellow-students of the University, previously estranged by a feud of more or less inveteracy, were induced, at the suggestion, I believe, of Mr. Shee, to acquiesce in an act of oblivion, and follow the example of their principals, by the re-establishment of friendly relations.

It was not often, in those days, that hostile "affairs" in Ireland were arranged with so extensively pacific a

result; but it may, perhaps, be said of parties so circumstanced, in the words of the "Critic," that where they did "agree, their unanimity" was "wonderful."

It is certain that, in this case, an acquaintance so oddly and inauspiciously commenced between Mr. Shee and his assailant, did not, as might have been expected, drop with the proceedings. During the remainder of Mr. Shee's residence in Dublin, they continued on terms of civil, if not friendly intercourse, which was renewed some years later in London.

It is not the least singular part of the affair, that shortly after the adjustment of the quarrel, Mr. King, the actor, for whom, as it was alleged, Mr. Shee had been mistaken, called on the latter to express his concern and surprise at the occurrence, the details of which had reached him, but for which he professed himself wholly unable to account; being, as he earnestly assured Mr. Shee, not only innocent, but ignorant of anything which could have furnished a cause of offence against him to Mr. O'Bryen.

With this warlike episode, I shall conclude the narrative of Mr. Shee's early life and professional career in his native country. Henceforth, we shall have to trace his progress in a wider field of action, where more formidable competition, and more arduous struggles awaited him. Full of hopeful ardour, and with many a bright anticipation of success not destined to be realized until after a long and dreary interval of toil and disappointment, he embarked for Liverpool on the 24th June, 1788.

CHAPTER III.

1788—1790.

Arrival in London.—Correspondence.—An Election.—Mr. Barry.—Delusive Prospects. — Social, Professional, and Family Details. — Pope, the Actor. —Mr. A——. — Sir G. Shee. — Mr. Burke. — Sir J. Reynolds. — Value of hereditary Friendships. — Grievous Disappointment. — Admission as a Student of the Royal Academy.

In these days of rapid locomotion by sea and land, it is curious to read of a voyage from Dublin to Liverpool in the month of June, which lasted two nights and a day, and was attended with considerable danger of shipwreck; while the subsequent land journey from Liverpool to London, performed by one of the most rapid public conveyances then on the road, appears still more unreasonable in its duration, having occupied no less than two nights and three days. The experience of continental travelling in our own day, however, in regions where the magic influence of the *rail* is still unknown, enables most of us to appreciate the *tædium* and discomfort of the tardy progresses, in *six-inside* coaches, to which all but the very wealthy among our fathers were condemned, when undertaking long journeys at the end of the last century. Mr. Shee arrived in London in the afternoon of Sunday the 29th June, 1788, and took up his temporary abode in Southampton Street, Covent Garden, where lodgings had been secured for him by some Dublin friends who were eagerly expecting his arrival. Some of his most intimate associates were, at this period, reading, or, to

speak more accurately, *eating* their way to the Irish bar, in obedience to that singular rule of the Irish courts, which requires all candidates for the forensic gown to keep four terms at one of the Inns of Court in London, as a qualification for practice in Ireland, in addition to the Dublin course of study, represented, in like manner, by a certain number of periodical attendances at "commons," in Hall, during term time. To the society of these kindred spirits, among whom were to be found more than one name of subsequent eminence at the Irish bar, Mr. Shee was indebted for much that cheered the gloom and lightened the cares of his early toilsome career in London.

With his arrival in the English metropolis, a new era in his life may be said to commence. His professional biography exhibits, as it were, a fresh starting-point from that period. The local success which had attended his youthful efforts in his own country, availed but little towards the advancement of his fortunes or the development of his views, in the new scene of action which now lay before him. It is true that on his departure from Ireland, he was well supplied with letters from influential friends in Dublin, to persons of similar position in London. But in some instances, these introductions proved abortive from accident; while in many others, his own disinclination to obtrude himself on the notice of men in high places, to whom he was professionally, as well as personally, unknown, produced the same result, and deterred him from profiting by opportunities which might, perhaps, have proved beneficial to his prospects. It is a singular fact that some of the letters of introduction which he brought with him to London in June, 1788, were found among his papers on his death, *sixty-two years after*.

wards, having remained undelivered and probably forgotten during the interval.

The time of his arrival in London was unfavourable to his chances of immediate notice from the world of taste. In those days, the parliamentary session was rarely protracted beyond midsummer; and the king's birth-day, the 4th of June, on which the last drawing-room usually took place at St. James's, was considered as the concluding festival of the London season. By the beginning of July, the town was as completely deserted by the higher ranks of society, as it is, in our day, in the middle of September; and it would appear from passages in Mr. Shee's early letters from London, that the greater number of those to whom he was recommended had left town for the summer, before his arrival.

Among the persons of note to whom he was the bearer of letters from friends in Dublin, was Edmund Burke; but the introduction so intended was not productive of any advantage to the young artist, although the credentials he bore were from a quarter every way unexceptionable. A few years later, however, he was more effectually brought to the notice of his illustrious countryman, through his own family connections, and, as will be seen hereafter, that circumstance was not without its influence on the course and direction of his professional studies.

The history of his proceedings for some years after his removal to London, may be traced with tolerable accuracy in the numerous letters addressed by him during that period to his brother, still resident in Dublin. Compelled to draw largely on this source of information, I cannot perhaps do better than allow him, as far as possible, to speak for himself, by copious

extracts from the correspondence in question. The nature of his pursuits, the state of his prospects, and, above all, the working of his mind, will thus be far better understood and appreciated than through the medium of mere narration.

A few weeks after his arrival in England, and on his return to Southampton Street from a short visit to the country, he found himself surrounded by the turmoil of a hard-fought election for Westminster; an event which in those days of fourteen days' polling, was commonly attended with partial, if not general, rioting throughout the court end of London; Covent Garden, where the hustings were erected, being, of course, the head-quarters of political excitement, and its neighbourhood, consequently, in the thickest of the fray. The contest in question, between Admiral Lord Hood and Lord John Townshend, is one of the most celebrated in the metropolitan annals of electioneering warfare; and to those of the present generation, whose political experience in such matters is derived from the peaceable and decorous proceedings of the last quarter of a century, the illustrations of demonstrative popular feeling supplied by the following letter will perhaps be as much matter of surprise as they seem to have been at the time to the recently initiated observer.

"26th July, 1788.

"Dear George,

. . . . . .

"My attention was called off by a bustle in the street, where I have been barbarously diverted by a long and well-fought battle between a hackney-coachman and a waggoner. The cause you will think rather extraordinary, and will perhaps smile when I tell you the affray originated entirely from a difference of political opinions,—or a trial by battle whether

Lord Hood or Lord John Townshend was the most proper person to represent the city of Westminster in Parliament. . . . . The dispute . . . . ended rather unfortunately for the courtier, who was exceedingly well beaten. I wish it may not prove ominous, or an anticipation of a more important defeat. To the impartial and unprejudiced mind, Hood must certainly appear most deserving. That man whose conduct in private life has evinced a total disregard to every tie either of honour or principle, gives but a very faint hope of acting with dignity or virtue in a public situation. The one continued to fight the battles of his country till the withering hand of time had decayed and enervated the vigour of his faculties. The other, far from joining in the service of his country, disgraces it by his profligacy. I am almost ashamed of having wasted so much of my paper on a subject so very uninteresting to you. But, I assure you, it so entirely engrosses the attention and conversation of every creature here,—from the peer of the realm to the meanest link-boy, that 'tis impossible to avoid mentioning it, particularly when one sees nothing but the cockades and banners of both parties, and hears nothing but the discussions from the strength of attachment to either side. 'Tis inconceivable the bustle and confusion that has been in this part of the town since the commencement of the election, and which, 'tis expected, will rather increase than diminish, as it draws towards the conclusion, which will not take place for another week. Not a day or night passes without some dangerous and sanguinary scuffles between the friends of the contending parties, in which some have been killed and many much wounded. To such a height had the riots risen the other night in Covent Garden, that the intervention of the military became absolutely necessary, and even then was it very difficult to restore peace and order. Last night in Bond Street there was an affray between two or three hundred sailors of Hood's party, and a vast number of butchers' boys and a detachment of that memorable and respectable body, the Irish chairmen, all for Townshend, in which, after much mischief and the demolishing of a public-house, the latter proved victorious, and routed the

tars with innumerable broken heads. Nor is the personal damage incurred on these occasions confined to the lower ranks of people.

"Many men of respectability and character, among whom are Colonel Kirkpatrick, a Mr. O'Brien, and, last night, a Mr. Macnamara, have been much cut and abused. Nay, Charles Fox himself had wellnigh received a very good drubbing.

"Having discussed the affairs of state, I shall now descend to particulars more immediately domestic. I have been three different times at Mr. Sneyd's and Mr. Edwards's, Mr. Barton's friends, also three times at Mr. Peter's, twice to Sir Henry Englefield's, and once to Mr. Edmund Burke, and have not as yet been so fortunate as to see any of them. They have all been in the country, except Mr. Burke, who is and has been so much interested in the business of this election, that I think it better not to apply any further to him till 'tis nearly concluded. . . . . I have seen Mr. Barry, and shall give you an account of my reception. . . . . Having discovered his place of residence, which is in Sherrard Street, I went there, and was informed by the inhabitant of the lower part, which is a shop, that Mr. Barry was at home, and in the dining-room. I accordingly went upstairs, tapped at the door, and was desired to walk in, when the odd appearance both of the person and chamber not a little surprised me. 'Mr. Barry, sir, I presume.' 'Yes, sir.'— I then presented my credentials, and was desired to be seated. Take notice, all this passed without his once stirring from his seat. While he was breaking the seal and reading the letter, both of which he [did] very leisurely, I had time to remark the appearance of the habitation and tenant. The room, which is pretty large, appeared, notwithstanding the negligence and confusion of the furniture, to have been once a good one. The floor seemed never to have experienced the luxury of an application of soap and water. The centre of it was covered by a carpet, the colour of which might once have been discoverable, but from its intimate connection with dust and dirty feet, had long since ceased to be distinguishable from the more exposed part of the flooring. The walls were perfectly concealed by an innumerable [quantity] of little statues,

busts, and old pictures, besides casts of legs, arms, skulls, bones, hands, feet, sketches, prints, drawings, palettes, pencils, colours, canvasses, frames, and every other implement calculated for the use of art, disposed in all the confusion and disorder of the most negligent carelessness.

"The figure of [Mr. B.] himself contributed not a little to heighten the scene.

"Conceive a little ordinary man not in the most graceful dishabille,—a dirty shirt, without any cravat, his neck open, and a tolerable length of beard, his stockings not of the purest white in the world, hanging about his heels—sitting at a small table in the midst of this chaos of artificial confusion, etching a plate from one of his own designs. The whole, I think, would furnish a scene worthy of the pencil of an Hogarth.

"When he had read the letter, he turned to me, and said he was sorry to find Mr. Broughall had been so long confined, but did not make the usual professions of satisfaction at being made acquainted with me or of inclination to serve me. We then chatted on common topics, and in the course of the conversation he took several opportunities of expressing his contempt for his country and countrymen; a very agreeable insinuation to me, you may be sure. His discourse, however, convinced me he was a man of great ability in the literary way, as well as in his professional line. The only advantage likely to accrue to me from my introduction is his getting me admission to the Royal Academy, which he promised to do on my showing him a drawing from the figure. . . . . He did not ask me to call again, which I intend doing notwithstanding, as I make allowance for the known originality of his character."

In the preceding chapter I have stated that on the occasion of his departure from Dublin, he was furnished by General Robert Cuninghame with an introduction to his brother, General James Cuninghame, an officer holding a high position in the royal household. This gentleman, like most of those to whose good offices Mr. Shee had been recommended by his Dublin friends, was absent from London at the time of his arrival, being

confined at Tunbridge Wells by a severe illness, which a few weeks later, terminated fatally. The letter addressed to him, of which Mr. Shee was the bearer, was, however, forwarded by the latter to Tunbridge Wells; and, after an interval of some weeks, a Mr. Dickie, a friend of the General's, who was then on a visit with him at that place, addressed the following letter to Mr. Shee on his behalf.

"Tunbridge Wells, 20th August, 1788.

"Sir,—General James Cuninghame, who has been much indisposed here for some time past, desires me to transmit the enclosed letter which came under cover to him from his brother, and to say that he is very sorry that illness prevents him from writing letters of introduction in your favour to the painters of eminence in London; but the General directs me to acquaint you that if you will wait upon Sir Joshua Reynolds in Leicester Square, and make use of his name, he is certain Sir Joshua will show you every civility and his capital collection. In like manner with Mr. Romney, who lives in Cavendish Square, and Mr. West, his Majesty's historical painter, in Newman Street. When the General is able to come to town, he will be very glad to see Mr. Shee, and to render him every service in his power."

Unluckily, the sincerity and value of these encouraging professions from one who was supposed to bask in the sunshine of royal favour, were not destined to be put to the proof. General Cuninghame's illness increased, and, at the end of three weeks, he returned to town to die, without having had an opportunity of enacting Mæcenas towards his brother's youthful *protégé;* and with him expired all Mr. Shee's hopes of arriving *per saltum* at that social and professional eminence which the more sanguine among his friends in Dublin took it for granted that he would achieve within a few months after his removal to London.

On the subject of this disappointment he writes as follows:—

"Sept. 14th, 1788.

. . . . .

"The papers, I suppose, have, ere this, advertised you of the death of General Jas. Cuninghame, a circumstance which I have since found to have been more unfortunate for me than I at first imagined. . . . . I on Monday received a note from the Irish General, informing me that he had come some time since from Ireland to attend his brother, and would be glad to see me any morning I chose to call at St. James's Place. In consequence of which I went there the next morning at eight o'clock, but did not find him at home. I was told his brother was much worse. The following day . . . . I repeated my visit, and was informed that he had died that morning at four o'clock. I thought it would be indelicate of me at that time, so immediately after so melancholy an affair, to obtrude myself, and therefore only left my name, with an intention of not calling again for some days. But the next evening, about five o'clock, as I was sitting at home reading, who should enter my room but the General and a Mr. Dickie, whose name you may recollect to have been to the letter I got from Tunbridge Wells. After the usual compliments of condolence on such occasions . . . . . he told me I had suffered a great loss in his brother's death, as he had it materially in his power to serve me, and intended to do so if he had lived. He appointed me to call upon him the next morning, which I did, when he gave me a crayon picture of his brother, by Hamilton (which you may recollect to have seen with me in Dublin) to copy for him. He is also to give me a letter to Sir Joshua, and, as he says himself, to puff me very much."

In a letter written apparently a few weeks later he says:—

"I have been to wait on Sir Joshua Reynolds, and was received, as I was taught to expect, with much politeness, but

nothing more. Indeed, from several questions he asked me, I am apt to imagine he had very little, if any, acquaintance with the General Cuninghame, who gave me the note to him. . . . . He showed me a very fine historical picture he has painted—the death of Cardinal Beaufort, from the play of 'Henry VI.' He certainly is altogether the best [painter] now living, and is considered as such here."

His journey to London had been deferred until after the closing of the exhibition of the Royal Academy; and the chief opportunities he had, on his arrival, of measuring his professional claims by the standard of contemporary merit, were supplied by the galleries of the most distinguished painters, to which, even as a stranger, he could, of course, without much difficulty, obtain frequent access. His attentive study of the works of these eminent men, among whom Reynolds and Romney were the especial objects of his admiration, occasioned at first a feeling of deep depression and discouragement, from the insight it gave him into his own deficiencies, and the rapidity with which it put to flight a host of ambitious dreams and visionary hopes in which he had almost unconsciously indulged, in reference to his professional prospects in London.

Few minds, indeed, could be more free from the taint of conceit, or less disposed to over-rate, in any respect, their own qualifications. But in the intellectual, as in the material world, the level of surrounding objects is the ordinary measure of altitude or elevation; and genius itself can form but an imperfect estimate of the scope and capacity of art, if debarred from all access to pure sources of taste, and high examples of excellence.

It may be fairly presumed that, in the absence of such advantages, our young student had been in danger of rating somewhat too highly the powers of his nearly untu-

tored pencil. But the despondency which attended his sudden and mortifying disenchantment was probably the result of an exaggerated conviction of his own inferiority. This feeling, reactionary in itself, would, naturally, after an interval of gloomy indulgence, be, in its turn, subject to reaction. We can, accordingly, soon trace, in his correspondence, the evidence of renewed and vigorous exertion, not uncheered by a returning consciousness of power and a hopeful sense of improvement.

In the mean time, as I have already intimated, he derived but scanty benefit from the efforts made by his Irish friends to recommend him to the notice of the world of taste in London. His letters, written at this period, afford, indeed, convincing proof of the interest taken in his success by many of his Dublin patrons, who might have been supposed to possess some social influence on this side of the Channel. But the echoes of fame depend very much, for their impression and value, on the quarter whence they are reverberated; and the French adage, — *parmi les aveugles un borgne est roi*, — might, in those days, seem no inappropriate comment on the most enthusiastic reports of artistic merit, if traceable to no higher source than the *dilettanti* circles of Dublin.

It is evident, from the account given above of his first interview with Reynolds, that the civility with which the courteous President, on that occasion, did the honours of his *studio*, was attributable rather to the kind feeling he was ever prompt to exhibit towards the humblest votaries of the art, than to the influence of an introduction on which General Cuninghame, in his friendly anxiety to serve his young *protégé*, had probably ventured without the warrant which fully

recognised claims of acquaintance could perhaps alone have effectually supplied. Sensitive, alike from temperament and education,—a sensitiveness partaking as much of pride as of timidity,—Mr. Shee evidently felt but little inclined to presume on an introduction which appeared to him deficient in authoritative weight. It seems clear that he had no further communication with Sir Joshua, down to the period—some eighteen months later—when he was brought to the notice of the President, under more promising auspices, and by the personal good offices of one whose slightest word in his favour would have sufficed to secure for him the friendly attention and judicious counsels of the illustrious head of the English school. But of this more hereafter.

It will be seen from the letter in which he describes his interview with Barry, that he at that time contemplated joining the ranks of the Academy as a student; an intention which he appears to have subsequently abandoned. The motive which induced this change of plans cannot now be ascertained; but it is certain that he took no steps towards obtaining admission to the schools of the Royal Academy, until he had been resident in London for nearly two years; and there is every reason to believe, that in entering himself on the list of probationers at that period, he acted merely in deference to the advice and express wish of Sir Joshua.

Towards the latter part of the autumn of 1788, Mr. Shee moved into more spacious and commodious lodgings in Craven Street, Strand; a locality which, if not very attractive in itself, as a residence, had at least the merit of being tolerably central, and in convenient proximity to the courtly region of St. James's, and the *bureaucratic quartier* of Whitehall. Here he applied himself assiduously to his easel, in the hope of completing

some pictures for the ensuing exhibition of the Royal Academy. He had, perhaps, but little hope of attracting the favourable notice of the critics; but he knew that his privileges as an exhibitor would secure for him, at all times, free admission to the annual display, where he could not fail to improve himself by a close study of the works of his contemporaries, whether in taking example by their merits, or warning from their defects.

Dreary and disheartening must ever be the early efforts of those who, unfriended and unknown, seek to establish themselves in public favour, amid the fierce and feverish competition of London professional life; and, with the exception of the physician, in whose case success is almost impossible until every vestige of youth has disappeared from the outward man, — there is no candidate for fame or fortune whose progress is more decidedly of an up-hill character than the young painter, striving to work his way, without the aid of wealthy or courtly patronage, in the busy metropolis. Not for him shines even the forlorn hope which the chapter of accidents may hold out to the obscure apothecary, the youthful surgeon, or the briefless *circuiteer*. A single summons to the *boudoir* of a dyspeptic dowager, in the absence of her favourite M.D., may go far to expand the nearest general practitioner, however nominal or *theoretic* his previous *practice*, into a Pennington or a Tegart. An *impromptu* highway attendance on an unhorsed chancellor, more skilled in *equity* than in *equitation*, may lay the groundwork of a surgical reputation, before which the star of Brodie may be doomed to pale its ineffectual fires. A pauper case of assault, or breach of promise of marriage, at the assizes, may supply "the golden, glorious opportunity" destined to launch the untried *Nisi-Prius* advocate on the full tide of forensic prosperity.

But for the struggling *tyro* in painting, there is no such *coup* on the cards. If destitute of powerful friends and connections to puff and sustain him, he must create, before he can improve, his opportunity; and until he can arrest the gaze of the fastidious *connoisseur* by *obtrusive* excellence on the walls of the Academy or the Institution, he must be content to "bide his time" in patient toil, and all but hopeless obscurity.

That Mr. Shee should, in this respect, share the fate of so many young artists of subsequent eminence, could be no reasonable matter of surprise or complaint; although the dreary ordeal was, in his case, rendered more irksome from the sad contrast it presented to the gratifying success of his Dublin career. But at nineteen, it is easy to work and *hope* on. A strong sense of duty, and great energy of purpose, effectually combated the desponding tendencies of a mind little inclined to be sanguine, even in the brightest periods of existence;—and his devotion to the art combined with an ardent desire for improvement to afford him that constant mental occupation which is ever among the most efficacious remedies for the sorrows of the past, or the anxieties of the future.

His first winter in London was tranquil and uneventful. It may be assumed that the amount of remunerative employment which fell to his share was comparatively trifling, and there was everything in his circumstances to suggest the strictest economy in his mode and habits of life. With a mind like his, earnestly bent on the attainment of intellectual eminence, there needed not the additional motive of worldly prudence to guard him against the allurements of idleness or dissipation. His time was spent in a systematic routine of close professional study during the day, and literary

occupation, often of a severe and laborious character, in the evening. The friends with whom he occasionally associated were, with few exceptions, young men of kindred intellect, who, if they had not the same earnestness of purpose and unflinching powers of application for which he was remarkable, were at least well qualified by talent, education, and principle, to afford him the necessary relaxation of congenial social intercourse.

Among the members of his profession he was as yet but little known. It does not appear that he improved his acquaintance with Barry, whose rather ungracious reception of him he has recorded in the passage above quoted, and from whom he had evidently no encouragement to repeat his visit. It is a singular fact that, in the fulness of time, and the gradual development of his professional career, he was destined to succeed both the eminent men to whom he was thus so unsatisfactorily introduced, in the respective positions which they then occupied in the Royal Academy. When, eleven years later, he took his place among the Royal Academicians, the vacancy supplied by his election was no other than that occasioned by the expulsion of Barry from the body of which he had been so distinguished an ornament.

Among the few individuals connected with his profession with whom he was brought into contact at this early period of his residence in London, was the actor Pope,—a name of some distinction in the records of the English drama, as well as in the annals of gastronomic science. This gentleman had commenced life as a miniature painter of some merit in Dublin, but, like many others, had been seduced from the paths of more laborious industry by the fascinating and too often delusive glitter of a stage life. At this period, he

was rising in reputation as a tragedian in London; and the critics of the daily press were cheering him on with sanguine predictions of future histrionic greatness. Engaged at one of the Theatres Royal at what was then a high salary, he was in the receipt of a good income, and enabled to occupy a handsome house in Clarges Street, Piccadilly, where he lived in a style of much comfort and respectability. Retaining a strong partiality for the pursuit to which he had been originally devoted, he was easily interested in the future prospects of the young artist with whom a casual introduction had made him acquainted, and in whom he was not slow to discover the promise of great social as well as professional talent.

In Mr. Shee's correspondence of this period, there is honourable and grateful mention of the hospitality with which he was entertained by Mr. Pope, and the agreeable and refined society, wholly unconnected with the stage, which he met in Clarges Street, at the table of his theatrical friend. Of Mrs. Pope, the first in a series of three wives whose fate was successively linked with that of the tragedian, during his chequered career, Mr. Shee, in his letters, speaks with enthusiasm, as of a person of distinguished and fascinating manners; and it is evident that the acquaintance was the source of some social enjoyment to him at a period when his opportunities of mixing in society were necessarily rare. Perhaps it may not have been without advantage, in a professional point of view; as his introduction to Pope was probably instrumental in affording him the means of exercising his pencil—albeit gratuitously,—on the features of certain dramatic *celebrities*, whose portraits were among the earliest which brought him into notice in the exhibition of the Royal Academy.

The wide divergence of career, and great dissimilarity of tastes and habits between the studious, steady and rigidly-abstemious artist, and the luxurious theatrical *bon-vivant*, were, no doubt, a bar to any close or lasting intimacy; but the acquaintance was kept up with mutual feelings of good-will, during a long course of years.

The professional reputation of Pope did not realise the promise of his youthful success; and his star was soon eclipsed by the more brilliant luminaries of the drama that shone conspicuous in the early part of the present century; nor can he be said to have come down to posterity in the same category as the Kembles, Keans, and Youngs, with whose traditionary glories the rising, as well as the passing generation may be assumed to be familiar. The latest dramatic memories conversant with his name relate, I think, to his personation of the ghost in "Hamlet," under the disadvantageous circumstances of a *physique* calculated to convey a distressing and disenchanting impression of the royal Dane's obesity. But Pope's gastronomic and symposial notoriety was of a more durable character; and his devotion to culinary science, with all its appropriate adjuncts of convivial indulgence, was long proverbial among those who study and appreciate the "good things of this life," under their most palpable and practical aspect. The story of his dismay and irrepressible indignation, on the unexpected appearance of a magnificent haunch of venison, at a table where, in full reliance on his host's assurance of a "plain family dinner," he had already dined heartily on boiled beef, is told with much piquancy by the witty and philosophical author of the "Art of Dining." This anecdote, in all its main features, tallies precisely with a scene of which

Mr. Shee was an eye-and-ear witness, when dining in company with Pope, at the house of Dr. Godbold, the patentee and, I presume, original concoctor of the "Vegetable Balsam," a receipt for patriarchal longevity, as celebrated in its day, and no doubt as efficacious, as the pills of Morison or the ointment of Holloway. Pope, on one occasion, many years later, experienced a disappointment equally ludicrous, but not so afflicting, at Mr. Shee's table in Cavendish Square. The port and claret were making their accustomed rounds during the dessert, — probably at an exemplary pace; — for Mr. Shee, although little short of a *teatotaller* himself, retained something of the Hibernian prejudice in favour of a brisk circulation of the bottle after the departure of the ladies. So far all was well: but at each successive circuit of the ambulatory "*coasters*," Pope's observant eye detected the suspicious fact that his host, though prompt to expedite their rotatory progress, never had recourse to their contents, but occasionally, and, as it seemed, rather surreptitiously, helped himself from a small unobtrusive decanter that remained stationary at his right hand, and through the clear crystal of which shone a bright amber-coloured liquid suggestive of the purest Amontillado vintage. Eager to expose and defeat so inhospitable a monopoly, Pope suddenly apostrophised his host in loud and jeering tones: "Come, come, my good friend, I perceive that you are nursing something good there, for your own private drinking. That decanter has never left your side. But it won't do! I'll trouble you for a glass."—"Oh! willingly," answered his Amphitryon, in apparent confusion. "I was just about to ask your opinion of it." And suiting the action to the word, he poured out a bumper

into the glass which Pope's eager hand extended for the purpose. The triumphant *connoisseur* raised the sparkling goblet to the light, and then drained the contents at a single draught. But no sooner had he done so, than a loud exclamation of horror and dismay burst from his lips, while his face wore an expression of the deepest disgust. "By the L—d!" exclaimed he, spluttering into his finger-glass, "it's — it's — nothing but ——" "*Toast-and-water*," quietly observed Mr. Shee; "a beverage to which Baillie restricts *me*. But I'm afraid it's not much in *your* line." A general burst of laughter from the rest of the company completed the mortification of the discomfited *gourmet*.

It was very shortly after Mr. Shee's arrival in London that he became acquainted with a person to whose name frequent reference is made in his correspondence — his intimacy with whom, while to all appearance holding out a prospect of some worldly benefit, would, there is reason to believe, but for the high principle and commendable prudence of the young painter, have been attended with disastrous consequences. The individual in question, whom I shall merely designate as Mr. A.——, as the mention of his name in connection with certain details of his career, might wound the feelings of some surviving descendant or relative, and be unnecessarily offensive to a well-known family whose patronymic he bore, was at the time of which I am now writing, and for many subsequent years, residing in a style of seeming affluence in the most fashionable *quartier* of London. Married to a lady of amiable and irreproachable character, the acknowledged natural daughter of a nobleman of very high rank and great political celebrity, who had given a large sum of money with her by way of marriage portion, Mr. A.—— bore about him so many external

indications of high respectability, that with a large circle of acquaintance whom his hospitality, his agreeable manners, and the estimable qualities of his wife attracted to his house, he passed for a most unexceptionable member of society. His ostensible occupation was that of a wine-merchant; and if not himself a great capitalist, he was supposed to be much connected with the moneyed world in London. There is little doubt that he was sometimes engaged in the delicate and confidential task of negotiating loans for the accommodation of the Prince of Wales (whose pecuniary involvements were at that time less notorious than they became a few years later); and by those who affected to be best acquainted with his position and proceedings, he was represented as possessing considerable influence with the heir-apparent of the monarchy. His appearance, manners, and conversation, bespoke a man accustomed to move in the best circles; and there was everything in his demeanour and visible *entourage* to put the wary off their guard, and conciliate the good opinion of the less cautious, in forming a judgment of his character. When, during the first few weeks of Mr. Shee's residence in England, this very specious personage sought an introduction to him, on the ground of having on one occasion visited his *studio* in Dublin, in company with a friend, the young artist was rather flattered by these advances from one whom he had heard mentioned in Ireland as a confidential agent of the prince, and a person of much consideration in London.

The acquaintance so commenced was followed up, on the part of Mr. A——, by many acts of courtesy, and frequent invitations to his house, where Mr. Shee was very hospitably received, and always welcomed with much cordiality by the wife and family of his new

friend. The society which he met at Mr. A——'s table, was apparently, and in most instances, actually unexceptionable in position; and although Mr. Shee was not long in making the discovery that his host entertained lax notions of morality with regard to his conjugal duties, and had a decided taste for high play at whist, some years elapsed before he was thoroughly enlightened as to the real character of the man, and made aware of the disreputable nature of those pursuits, for the more effective carrying on of which his respectable style of living, his handsome house, and gentlemanlike establishment were intended, or at least used, as a blind and a decoy.

In addition to his ostensible business of a wine-merchant, he seems to have been a sort of *general practitioner* in the art of "raising the wind;" and among his numerous contrivances for effecting that purpose, he had under his control and management a snug little *salon de jeu*—a private *hell*, in convenient vicinity to his domestic residence. But he would appear to have exercised the greatest circumspection, in confiding the secret and communicating the benefits of this attractive establishment to the friends and acquaintances whom he invited to his house; and probably none but highly-promising subjects, as to wealth and obvious *gullibility*, were selected for the hazardous experiment, or initiated in the mysteries of this unobtrusive temple of fortune.

It may well be supposed that Mr. A—— was not anxious to enlighten his young friend Shee, as to the existence of this *den*, or his own identification with the *genius loci*. Whatever remote or contingent benefit he might promise himself from his intimacy with the young artist—and it is difficult to ascribe a disinterested motive to the civilities of a man so utterly unprincipled

as A——, it must have been perfectly clear to him that Mr. Shee's position and circumstances were not such as to afford any prospect of *plunder*, through the ordinary machinery by means of which the wealthy and thoughtless were laid under contribution; and a very short experience of his straightforward character must have sufficed to convince the astute adventurer that in order to retain him on the list of his acquaintance, it was essential to keep him in the dark as to the more objectionable points of a career which bore so fair an outward semblance of propriety and decorum.

It appears singular that under the circumstances, Mr. A—— should have attached any importance to the intimacy of one whose ideas and feelings were so little in accordance with his own, and whose pecuniary resources afforded no scope for the exercise of his acquisitive genius. But to men of his class, a fresh name and a new connection sometimes hold out a prospect of collateral, if not direct, advantage; and the dupe who is utterly valueless as a *victim*, may often be rendered serviceable as a decoy or a *tool*. This view of the case may perhaps supply the true key to a few particulars of Mr. A——'s conduct, in which, at the time, the unsuspicious student saw nothing but the evidence of much kind feeling towards himself.

From the commencement of their acquaintance, Mr. A—— seemed good-naturedly bent on affording his young friend frequent opportunities of enjoying the bachelor amusements of a London life. Among the various scenes of social recreation, of which he volunteered to do the honours for the benefit of the stranger, was a club, composed of a number of gentlemen who met periodically to dine and play at whist. Each member of this fraternity had the privilege of intro-

ducing a friend at their dinners; and, as may be supposed, the honorary recruit on these occasions, was not restricted to the free enjoyment of the convivial benefits of the society; but was fully entitled, and probably expected, to *cut in*, after the more serious business of the evening had commenced. To this attractive circle A—— was earnestly bent on introducing Mr. Shee; and when the latter excused himself from time to time, on the ground that he had neither money nor inclination to take part in the regular amusements of the society, he was met by the assurance that he should not be required to join the card-table, and assailed by plausible representations of the professional advantages to be derived from extending his acquaintance among persons of wealth and consideration, such as were to be found in the ranks of the club. Impressed, to a certain extent, by this view of the question, and unwilling to exhibit an ungracious reluctance to profit by civilities so kindly intended, Mr. Shee at length consented to accompany his friend to one of the club dinners.

The day passed off agreeably. The company were intelligent and well bred; the *menu* was substantial and inexpensive, and the visitor's refusal to join in a rubber was apparently taken in good part by all present. Some surprise was expressed at his determination, and a little polite entreaty resorted to by one or two of the company; but there was no embarrassing or annoying importunity; and the different groups of whist-players arranged themselves at their respective tables, without urging him further on the subject. Mr. Shee was unwilling to retire immediately from the party, deeming such a proceeding rather uncourteous towards his introducer. Although unwilling, from motives of prudence,

to play, he was well acquainted with the game, and therefore derived some amusement from looking on at the table where Mr. A—— had taken his seat. After some little time employed in this way, a waiter entered the room and informed Mr. A—— that there was a gentleman outside waiting to speak to him. He rose at once from the table, in the midst of the game, and addressing Mr. Shee, who was standing behind his chair, said: "Shee, my dear fellow, oblige me by holding my cards until I return: I shall be back in a minute or two;" and before Mr. Shee had time for deliberation, hurried out of the room. Thus entrapped, Mr. Shee was obliged to sit down and take his chance, probably in equal ignorance of the stake and the score. He played his best; but in a very short time the rubber came to an end, and he found himself under the unpleasant necessity of handing over a couple of guineas towards the squaring of the account. The rest of the party were of course for starting afresh, and expressed much astonishment that he should refuse to take his revenge. But this trifling experience of "the pace," though so rapidly acquired, was quite sufficient to enlighten him as to the peril of the sport, and he was resolute in his determination to play no more. He was, however, relieved from all difficulty on the point by the reappearance of Mr. A——, who, after carelessly inquiring how his substitute had fared in his absence, and not waiting for an intelligible reply, resumed his seat at the table, and was soon deep in the chances of a fresh rubber.

Whether any more pitfalls of a like nature awaited him in a circle where many seemed benevolently anxious to develop his talents, and arouse his dormant predilection for the "odd trick," cannot be ascertained,

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as he took good care not to repeat his visit to a scene where he was exposed to such inconvenient casualties. The incident may, in itself, appear trifling; nor did it at the time suggest to him any misgivings as to the views of his off-hand acquaintance. But it subsequently acquired significance in his mind, as connected with a systematic endeavour on the part of A—— to introduce him to scenes where he might be easily betrayed into dissipation and excess, — while, with rare generosity, the most liberal advances by way of loan were pressed on his acceptance, from an apparently considerate estimate of the numerous expenses to which, as a stranger in London, he was likely to be led. "My dear Shee," urged this amiable philanthropist, "you are a young man, and of course anxious to see a good deal of the town. At your age, you must wish to enjoy yourself. I know that, like most younger brothers, you are not overburthened with cash, — you must surely be occasionally short of money. Do allow me to be your banker. If a hundred pounds would be of use to you at any time, say but the word, — you shall have a cheque for the amount, — and repay me at your convenience."

This was tempting language to a youth of nineteen, often in serious anxiety about the wherewithal to pay his next quarter's rent, and, notwithstanding his severe economy, under constant apprehension of being forced to trespass on the kindness of those relatives in Dublin, to whose provident affection he was already so much indebted. But his honest pride of independence would not suffer him, for the sake of present enjoyment or convenience, to incur, without necessity, a heavy pecuniary obligation, or to accept from a stranger, however wealthy or generous, a loan, to the repayment of

which he did not clearly see his way. These offers of assistance and accommodation, often reiterated, were always gratefully but firmly declined; and thus, his manly spirit and upright principles performed the part of worldly wisdom and experience, in saving him from what was unquestionably nothing less than a dangerous snare.

In adopting this course, Mr. Shee was wholly unbiassed by any distrust of the feeling to which these offers were attributable. It clearly appears, from his letters written at this period, that he had every confidence in the solvency, as well as in the friendly regard of his seemingly generous acquaintance; and it was not until successive discoveries as to the real nature of A——'s pursuits had afforded abundant proof of the delusive character of his apparent prosperity, that the motive of so unusual a display of liberality was fully appreciated by its intended victim.

Some circumstances connected with Mr. Shee's family, to which I must briefly advert, may perhaps throw some light on the mystery of Mr. A——'s behaviour towards him.

The eldest of Mr. Shee's paternal uncles, Anthony Shee, of Castlebar, who inherited the family property in that neighbourhood, had died many years previously, leaving a large family by his wife, a Miss Burke, of the county of Galway, who was a relative of the illustrious orator and statesman of that name. The eldest son, George, a young man of talent and energy, unwilling to rely, for his prospects in life, on the moderate and rapidly-diminishing patrimony to which he had a chance of succeeding on his father's death, had, at the age of eighteen, accepted an appointment as a writer in the civil service of the East India Company,

which was, I believe, placed at his disposal, through the interest of his kinsman, the Right Honourable Edmund Burke. At the close of a highly prosperous and honourable career in the East, during which he displayed administrative abilities of a high order, and even achieved some military distinction, having been present and actively engaged, as a volunteer, at the siege and capture of Pondicherry in the year 1778, he had, at the period to which our narrative now refers, recently returned from India, after an absence of twenty years. Still in the prime of life, — possessed of a large fortune, — with great activity of mind and highly prepossessing manners, he had found a large and powerful connection, both in England and Ireland, ready to welcome him on his return home, and not unwilling to second the efforts of the legitimate ambition which prompted him to seek fresh opportunities of distinction, and honourable employment in the service of the State. His intimacy with Mr. Burke, whose esteem and respect he enjoyed in an eminent degree, soon paved the way for his introduction into the highest political circles in England; — and in Ireland, the magnates of his native county — the Altamonts and Lucans — on finding the heir of his ancient but latterly impoverished line returning with amply replenished coffers, and sound views in Church and State, to take up his proper position as one of the great landholders of the district, soon furbished up the fading memories of ancestral friendship, and hailed him as a valuable acquisition to their social and political ranks.

Doubtless, Mr. A——, who made it his business to be acquainted with the past, present, and probable future of all those whom accident or design might

bring within the range of his influence, had early ascertained the fact of Mr. Shee's relationship to the distinguished *nabob*, whose wealth and political prospects were already the theme of gossip and speculation among the smaller fry connected with "the prince's set," among whom, as we have seen, A—— had, in some manner, contrived to establish himself: and this relationship seemed to offer an obvious and easy channel, through which the enterprising and Janus-like wine-merchant could be brought into contact with one whose acquaintance might be made subservient to his views.

That this idea was among the motives, if not the sole motive, of his civility to the young painter, the latter had, subsequently, abundant reason to believe; although, at the commencement of his acquaintance with A——, and long afterwards, he would have laughed at the suggestion as far-fetched and absurd. At the time of his removal to London, he was personally unknown to his cousin, who had sailed for India before he was born; and although during the lifetime of the elder Mr. Shee, an occasional letter from the absent nephew, of whom he was justly proud, had kept him *au courant* as to the principal events of the prosperous career which the friends and family of "the nabob" had always anticipated,—since his father's death, the young artist had been too much engrossed by his own affairs and prospects, to bestow much attention on the fortunes of a kinsman whose more brilliant lot seemed to be cast in very remote regions, and whose degree of consanguinity, however genealogically near, was such as involves no mutual obligation of cordial intercourse, where the slender tie of mere family feeling has not been strengthened by early and intimate association.

On leaving Dublin, therefore, Mr. Shee had probably attached but little importance to the fact that his oriental cousin had returned from India, and was to be found somewhere in England: and when, some time after his own arrival in London, his friends in Ireland urged upon him the expediency of seeking out his cousin George Shee, and making himself known to a relative who might have the power and inclination to serve him, the suggestion was received with feelings of the deepest vexation, and combated in a tone of indignant remonstrance, as exposing him to an intolerable humiliation, in making advances to one who could not be expected to feel any interest in his affairs, and would think meanly of him for the attempt to force himself on the notice of his unknown kinsman, solely on the ground of his wealth and worldly advantages.

The vehemence with which, in several passages of his correspondence at this period, he expresses his repugnance to comply with the request which the more practical views of his Dublin connections continued to urge upon him, is calculated to provoke a smile; and although he was perhaps not wholly mistaken in the spirit, nor unreasonable in the grounds of his protest, the feeling exhibited by him throughout the discussion, is highly characteristic of the proud and sometimes rather morbid sensitiveness for which he was through life remarkable.

Unwilling, however, to disoblige the aunt to whose wishes he owed every reasonable deference, he was at length induced to make some inquiries as to the whereabouts of his prosperous cousin. The information elicited by his reluctant researches was highly satisfactory in its negative character; and it was no doubt an inexpressible relief to him to find that his formidable

kinsman had no fixed residence in London, — that he was absent at the time from the metropolis, and that the period of his return was quite uncertain.

Subsequent events proved that he was greatly mistaken in his estimate of his cousin's feelings towards the less prosperous members of his family. While he was thus gratuitously chafing under the supposed necessity of introducing himself to the notice of this fortunate kinsman, the latter was revisiting his native country, and taking some pains to ascertain the position and prospects of his uncle's family: and when, some twelve months later, he returned to take up his residence for some time in London, he was, as will be seen by Mr. Shee's letters at that and subsequent periods, prompt to recognise the talents of his youthful relative, and stimulate his honourable ambition by encouraging commendation of his efforts, and judicious counsel as to his professional and social career.

A few extracts from Mr. Shee's family letters during his first winter and season in London, will supply all that can be most accurately ascertained of his feelings, views, and prospects during that period.

To his Brother.

"7th November, 1788.

. . . . . .

"You next ask me what I have painted for improvement, and whether I have improved. If I am ever to improve, I have now the opportunity, surrounded as I am by the first works in every branch of art; and if the blindness of self-approbation does not mislead, me I think I am improving. I was yesterday to see Boydell the publisher's famous gallery of pictures and prints, where I feasted for more than two hours. He has all

the artists in London of any eminence employed painting pictures of the different scenes in Shakespeare's plays, from which there are prints engraving for a work the most spirited, extensive, and expensive you can well conceive. He has in his gallery portraits painted by Stewart of all the artists he has employed, amongst which are Sir Joshua, Mr. West, Copley, Woollet, and many more. They are not the best pictures I have seen of Stewart's. I also saw one of the finest portraits Sir Joshua ever painted, of Lord Heathfield *, from which we are to have a print. . . . . .
I am myself making an experiment in the historical line, and have nearly finished a picture of King Lear in the storm with Gloster and Edgar. Whether 'twill be well enough to do me credit, I cannot say. The trial has however showed me that I have more invention than I thought. If 'tis approved of when finished, I intend putting it in the exhibition.

"The other pictures I have painted are one of Tom †, one of a Mr. Castles, a lad of the Temple, one of a Mr. Little ‡, whom you recollect to have seen in Dublin, and some studies from a Turk whom I met in the street. . . . . You also wish to know the state of my finances. . . . . .
Notwithstanding the strictest exertions of economy and self-denial in every case of amusement or any matter not absolutely necessary, which might tend to draw forth money, I have expended more than I expected to do, but have the satisfaction of not being able to accuse myself of one single act of extravagance or dissipation of any sort."

In reference to the strictness of his moral principles, which would appear to have been the subject of some either eulogistic or sneering comment, on the part of a

* Now in the National Gallery.

† Mr. Nugent, the gentleman to whom the letters cited in the preceding chapter were addressed, and who had, like himself, come to seek his fortune in London.

‡ Sir Martin's early and highly-valued friend, the late George Little, Esq., of Pencraig Court, Herefordshire.

Dublin acquaintance who had fallen in with him during a visit to London, he writes as follows:—

"I did not think my friend Rogers had sufficient opportunity in the short space of one evening that we spent together, to remark any continued adherence to those unfashionable and antiquated principles that have been so long and universally exploded by all polite and well-bred moderns. The event, however, has proved him possessed of more sagacity than I imagined. I am far, however, from assuming to myself any merit in resisting the allurements to a line of dissipation (or rather vice), of which my inclination and inability render me equally incapable. For I assure you, in this great city, depraved and vitiated as it is, the strongest tendency to depravity cannot well display itself without the means—that means is money, and of which not a little is requisite. I flatter myself, however, that were the treasures of Crœsus at my command, the power of mixing in all the extravagance of fashionable dissipation would not constitute any part of my satisfaction on the occasion."

To the Same.

"Sunday, 1st March, 1789.

. . . . . .

"You charge me with not being sufficiently explicit in my communications of what I am painting or have painted. But surely not with much justice. For, believe me, I never have knowingly suppressed any piece of information which I thought could have afforded you the least satisfaction. But I perceive I should not, most probably, have incurred this accusation, if I had, besides mentioning my having finished such and such pictures, told you they surpassed everything ever executed by the hands of art. We are all, in every situation of life, naturally inclined to be favourable to our own performances. The beauties, whether real or imaginary, we dwell on with pleasure; the faults we are seldom disposed to search for, and still more seldom do we discover or even admit them when pointed out. The works of a poet or painter are the offspring of his fancy, the children of his imagination. He views them

with all the weak-sighted prejudice of a fond parent, and he looks on them through the delusive optic of natural affection, which magnifies and gives a glow to their perfections, while their blemishes are diminished and obscured. He examines them, not with the impartial eye of a discerning critic, but through the inverted medium of interested partiality, prepared to approve and anxious to applaud. Thus circumstanced, is it to be expected that he can decide on them with an unbiassed judgment, or make a just and candid estimation of their merits? Certainly not! On the contrary, 'tis more than probable his remarks will prove the dictates of vanity, founded on the visionary phantoms of presumptuous self-approbation, and his very censures be made an ingenious conveyance for indirect and unmerited commendation. After what I have said, you will perhaps little expect that I should immediately fall into an error that I have so much condemned; but so it is! for so strong an inclination do I feel to gratify every wish of yours, however *unreasonable*, that I am at this instant about to snatch the trumpet from the hand of Fame, and sound my own panegyric! Be it remembered, however, as some salvo to my *modesty*, that 'tis *merely* to comply with your reiterated request. First, then, the old man's picture, which, in my last, I believe I told you I had finished, is very much approved of by Tom, who is my censor, and has also been much liked by every one who has seen it; and Smyth's portrait, Nugent's, and some others are thought so much better than Jemmy Wilder, that I never show it but as a foil to the superiority of the rest. This may convince you that I have in some degree improved; which if I did not myself think, that thought, with many other disagreeable ones, would make me miserable indeed. I shall now, according to your desire, proceed to give you an account of how I spend Sunday. The hairdresser attends me about seven in the morning; by which means I am enabled to dress and accomplish my breakfast by half after ten, at which time I set forward on a visit to the Neapolitan* ambassador's, in Lincoln's-Inn

* This is apparently a mistake. The Catholic Chapel in Duke Street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields, was the chapel of the Sardinian Embassy, and was, I believe, at that time connected with the official residence of the Sardinian minister in Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

Square. I am under the necessity of going thus early, otherwise I should run the risk of not getting in, or, if I did, of being squeezed to a jelly. Even as it is, I get pretty well of that. There I regularly hear High Mass, accompanied by an excellent organ and good choir of singers, the principal of whom is Mr. Dignum, of Drury Lane Theatre. The harmony, however, is not seldom interrupted by the discordant yell of some fanatical enthusiast, who bellows forth at your ear in tones as harsh, uncouth, and discordant as the Indian war-whoop, and full as destructive of every kind of melody or effect. I am astonished such croaking ravens are suffered to confound all musical arrangement, and disturb the devotion of the congregation with the grating discord of their barbarous vociferation. The mass is seldom over before half-past twelve, at which time I return to meet Tom, and, if the day is fine, walk through St. James's Street, Pall Mall, and Piccadilly into Hyde Park. If it should prove disagreeable, I generally sit down, as I have done to-day, and hold a little conversation with you, till dinner; after which we return home, drink tea, read, sketch, or write for the rest of the evening. A sober plan enough, you will probably think."

To the Same.

"22nd March, 1789.

. . . . . .

"Some of your questions relative to the opening of the exhibition you have before this found to have been anticipated in my last. Those that remain I shall now proceed to answer. . . . . I have not painted in crayons since I did the picture for General Cuninghame; nor do I intend exhibiting anything in that way, as I wish to give my attention entirely to oil-painting. I intended exhibiting four pictures; but the disagreeable expense of framing renders it necessary for me to give in but half that number—the old man, and a portrait of Tom Smyth, which is by much my best. I hoped to have had pictures of A——, the wine-merchant, and Pope; but the former never could find time to give me more than one sitting; and the latter unfortunately took it into his head to exhibit his

own picture, painted by himself, and thus effectually put a stop to his intention of fulfilling his promise of sitting to me. . . . . I have just returned from chapel.
We had High Mass, and *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving for the recovery of his Majesty."

The last sentence in the preceding extract relates to the recovery of king George III. from the attack of insanity with which his Majesty was afflicted in the latter part of the year 1788, and which was the occasion of much perplexity to the ministry of the day, in reference to the provision which it became necessary to make for a regency. The British Houses of Parliament had proposed to appoint the Prince of Wales regent, under conditions and limitations materially restricting the exercise of the royal prerogative; while the Irish Lords and Commons, in the plenitude of their recently-acquired independence, had agreed in a vote conferring on his Royal Highness, as regent, the rights of sovereignty in as full and unfettered a manner as if he had become entitled to them by the demise of the Crown. The complete restoration of his Majesty's mental powers occurred, however, most opportunely, to obviate the administrative embarrassments which might have ensued from this awkward discrepancy between the views of loyal duty and constitutional expediency, entertained on opposite sides of the Irish Channel. The unexpected and almost unhoped-for convalescence of a sovereign endeared by his domestic virtues, and even by his political faults, to a loyal and high tory population, had produced an universal feeling of thankfulness throughout the community, which added the grace of unusual and heartfelt sincerity to the public demonstrations of joy prescribed, on the occasion, by ministerial policy and courtly etiquette. A few details in the

following letter, connected with this scene of national rejoicing as exhibited in London, may perhaps not be without interest for the reader, as proceeding from the pen of a contemporary and eye-witness.

To the Same.

"London, 27th April, 1789.

. . . . . .

"This city for the last entire week has been one continued scene of noise, bustle, and confusion, in consequence of the procession to St. Paul's and the after illumination. The principal streets and avenues had more the appearance of a fair than an assemblage of casual passengers; and on the day of thanksgiving, 'twould be impossible to convey to you any idea of the multitude collected. At five o'clock in the morning, Nugent and I sallied forth to take possession of our seats in R——'s lodgings in the Strand; and even at that early hour, and notwithstanding the morning was wet and unpromising, the streets were already lined by the guards, and so full of people as to make it necessary for us to take a back way in order to avoid the crowd. The window-frames of most of the shops and windows were taken out, and seats erected in the inside in the style of galleries, and balconies outside for the accommodation of a greater number of spectators. In short, everything was surprising and wonderful but the procession itself, which fell far short of my expectations, and was, I think, by no means adequate to the preparation for viewing it. As I suppose you have had in the newspapers a particular account of it, I shall not enter into a description of it. The most magnificent part of it was, thirteen royal carriages, twelve of which had six horses each, and the thirteenth (in which were the king and queen) eight. In the others were the princesses, lords, ladies of the bedchamber, maids of honour, &c. In elegance and taste, the carriages and *suite* of the Prince of Wales had much the superiority. . . . . On Friday night, the town was illuminated; and then, indeed, was a scene which 'tis impossible you can form any idea of. The wildest chimeras of the

most extravagant and romantic imagination could not have equalled the splendour and brilliancy of the public buildings, particularly the Bank, India House, and Excise Office. On the first alone was computed to be above twelve thousand lamps, disposed in the greatest variety of beautiful devices, and interpersed with admirable transparent paintings applicable to the occasion of rejoicing.

"The expense of the decoration and lighting of this building alone, is said to have cost near four thousand pounds. . . . . I have kept this letter open to this evening, for the purpose of giving you some information about the exhibition, which opened this day. On the whole I cannot say it has perfectly answered my expectations; though I have seen enough to make me perfectly acquainted with myself, if I before had not sufficient of that knowledge. My pictures are situated tolerably well. They have not the *best* places in the room; but they have better than I could have expected. The post will not allow me to give you a particular account of it; but next week you may depend on having the most accurate information."

To the Same.

"Monday, 12th May, 1789.

. . . . . .

"In my last, I had neither time nor room to give you a particular account of the exhibition. In this, however, I will endeavour to satisfy even *your* curiosity. As I have some reason to think you are more interested in my pictures than in those of any other person, I shall first touch on them. . . . They are sufficiently conspicuous, but the light is unfavourable, except in some points of view. On the whole, however, they are not so very much injured by the company they are in as I feared; nor were my hopes ever more sanguine of being soon able (if other matters can be brought to bear) to emerge from the crowd even in London. My not having seen the last exhibition was, I assure you, no small disadvantage to me, as thereby I was prevented having the necessary ideas of situation, and what style of picture is required. Next year, however, if I live and

am able to purchase so much canvas, I'll send in a whole length of some kind or other. . . . . Ever since the exhibition opened, I have been in a frame of mind which, if it continues, will, I hope, prove serviceable to me, by exciting me to as much exertion for improvement as I am capable of.

"Sir Joshua Reynolds as usual exhibits a great number, (thirteen), most of which are indeed very fine; particularly the Irish Chancellor*, a half length of R. B. Sheridan, Cupid and Pysche, Cymon and Iphigenia, Robin Goodfellow the fairy. . . . . Lawrence, of all the young artists stands foremost, and deservedly carries away the greatest share of praise. He, I think, will be of service to me, as you may be sure I am not a little incited to exertion by his merit. The small difference in years between him and me rouses me more to emulation, than all the artists in London put together. He has exhibited a whole length of Lady Cremorne, a half length of a Mr. Hunter, a whole length of a young lady, and a half length small drawing of the Duke of York, besides *nine* other pictures and drawings. . . . . .

"I generally go to the exhibition every evening about five, and stay there till it shuts, which is after seven."

The preceding extract contains the first mention which occurs in Mr. Shee's correspondence, of the great artist who for so long a period stood pre-eminent among the British school, in the department of portraiture; and the terms in which the young and ambitious student records his early impression of one who was destined to be his successful competitor in the contest for fame, and his immediate predecessor in the highest dignity of the profession, will not, perhaps, be read without interest. The admiration so frankly avowed for the talents of his more fortunate contemporary was no transient feeling on Mr. Shee's part, but was sustained throughout by the verdict of his more mature taste and more deliberate

* The first Viscount Lifford.

judgment. From the date of this early and ungrudging tribute to the superiority of a youthful rival, down to the day when, as his successor in the academic chair, and on the great biennial solemnity of the institution, he pronounced a glowing and elaborate panegyric on the merits of the deceased President, Sir Martin was ever foremost to appreciate and extol those high and refined qualities of art and taste which gave to Lawrence's pencil its resistless charm, and fully justified his unprecedented popularity.

In a subsequent letter he returns to the subject.

To his Brother.

[May] "18th, 1789.

"I am glad to find my account of the exhibition was not displeasing; and can plainly perceive Lawrence's progress in his profession has not advanced him much in your good graces. Your many inquiries concerning him I shall endeavour to answer as satisfactorily as possible. First, then, I am acquainted with him, so far as to call upon him now and then. I have not yet asked him to see me, but intend it shortly. He is a very genteel, handsome young man, but rather effeminate in his manner. A newspaper that puffs him here very much says he is not yet one-and-twenty; and I am told by some of the students who knew him in Bath that he is three-and-twenty. When I lodged in Aungier Street, I remember poor Stokes showing me a picture of Lady Leeson painted by him in Bath, and at that time he was looked upon as an artist of great merit there. He is wonderfully laborious in his manner of painting, and has the most uncommon patience and perseverance. As yet he has had the advantage of me in length of practice and opportunities of improvement. This is his fifth year of exhibiting in London. His price is ten guineas a head, and I hear he intends raising it. There is no young artist in London bids so fair to arrive at excellence, and I have no doubt he will, if he is careful, soon make a fortune."

There were at that time in London two rival exhibitions of a peculiar character, under the respective direction of two individuals whose names are honourably associated with the history of the art in this country, by reason of their judicious and liberal efforts to foster native talent in the highest branches of painting, in connection with the commercial enterprises in which they were severally engaged. Boydell's Shakspeare Gallery and Macklin's Gallery of the British poets afforded to many a rising genius, the opportunity of exercising his pencil in the illustration of the noblest passages of our dramatic and poetic literature. The receipts of admission money to these exhibitions supplied, in the season, a regular source of profit to their enterprising proprietors; while to the publication of a series of splendid engravings from the works composing the gallery, each looked for the more certain reimbursement of the large sums expended in the purchase of the *chefs-d'œuvre* which formed its attraction.

In pursuance of a system which seems to have prevailed extensively in those days, the engraver employed to carry into effect this latter part of the undertaking, did not, in every case, work from the picture itself, but was, in many instances, dependent on a copy in oils, carefully and accurately made, on a reduced scale, by some competent artist of modest pretensions, for the express purpose of supplying the place of the original, in the process of engraving.

It would appear that in the summer of 1789, Mr. Shee was applied to,—I know not through what channel, but perhaps in consequence of the merit observable in the pictures which he had sent to the Royal Academy,—to assist in the undertaking of Mr. Macklin, by employing his pencil in the humble and subordinate

function to which I have just adverted. It was, probably, not without a pang, that he accepted a proposal involving the sacrifice of a great portion of his time to what he felt as an irksome, and perhaps a mortifying drudgery. But whatever vague hopes he may have originally entertained of carrying public favour by storm, had been effectually put to flight by sober experience, which in leading him to a more correct view of his own prospects, had rendered him fully alive to the arduous nature of the struggle in which he was engaged, and the inexpediency of neglecting any source of remunerative labour which might be opened to him, within the fair range of professional occupation. It appears accordingly from his correspondence during this and the next year, that he was frequently engaged in making copies for Macklin of different works in his collection; and however distasteful the task may have been in itself, there can be no doubt that he performed it with zeal and ability, and achieved, in its execution, as gratifying an amount of success as the nature of the pursuit would admit. His acquaintance with persons in the position of Messrs. Macklin and Boydell, whose good report carried with it considerable weight in the circles of taste, certainly exercised a beneficial influence on his professional career, and led, in due time, to the employment of his pencil in higher and more satisfactory departments of the art. In this, his first professional season in London, if not wholly without profitable employment as a portrait-painter, he could not, certainly, have relied on his labours in that character for defraying the expenses of the passing day; and Macklin's humble patronage, however unexciting in its form, was invaluable as a means of removing or mitigating the daily cares which by those who

have no personal experience of the *res angusta domi*, are often supposed to stimulate the ardour, while, in reality, they serve but to paralyse the energies, of genius.

"Satur est, cum dicit Horatius: Euhoe."

To his Brother.

[1789.]

. . . . . .

"The picture which I am to copy for Macklin I expect this day. My copy has met with more flattering approbation than I could have expected, and is liked better than those of any other artist he has employed. I believe instead of eight guineas I shall get twelve for it, which won't be *very mortifying*. Macklin told Nugent's friend, Mr. Gardiner, that he was very sorry he had not heard of me sooner, as he would have given me all his best pictures to copy. I have also had a visit from Boydell (the conductor of the famous work of Shakspeare), who was brought by Pope, to whom I hold myself rather indebted. He had heard of my copy, and wished to see it, as he also has many pictures to copy. I had it not, however, to show him; nor do I believe I can get it, as there is an envious rivalship between him and Macklin, which makes it improper to ask it, particularly as it is now in the engraver's hands. What pleased me not a little was, that Boydell, who paints very well himself, spoke very highly of my portraits, not only to me, but to others, as I have since been informed. One in particular, the last I have finished, of Mr. Billington, he spoke much of. The picture, indeed, has met with such approbation from those that have yet seen it, as might perhaps make me vain, had I not in the works of others a barrier against the approach of presumption, and within myself an idea of excellence which serves to show me how low, how very low I am."

To the Same.

"10th June, 1789.

"In my last I told you of my intention to dine with the artists on the king's birthday. My chief reason was that I

might have an opportunity of personally knowing those men whose works had stamped them with respectability and genius. In this I was, however, disappointed, as from the vast number of the company, and my not having any person more generally acquainted than myself to point out those I wished to see, I returned just as wise as I went; except that Wilder, who was brought there as a friend of the secretary's, introduced me to a Mr. Tresham, a countryman of ours, just returned from Italy (where he has been studying fourteen years) with a vast deal of fame, and, I believe, some merit in the historical way. He at least draws very finely. He paints no portraits. The meeting of the artists on this occasion, and the style and respectability of their attendance and appearance, naturally led to some comparisons with the St. Luke's dinners in Dublin, not much, you may imagine, to the advantage of the latter. On entering the room at five o'clock I had a very good appetite, but soon lost it without the dinner contributing anything to its removal. My situation, amidst a crowd of men to almost all of whom I was a perfect stranger, and almost all of whom my thoughts (at that moment the most humble and modest in the world) represented as superior to me alike in merit and in fortune, produced many reflections not much tending to sharpen the edge of appetite. I could not avoid thinking of the petty circle of petty artists where I was considered as *somebody*, and opposing it to the extensive scene of merit and abilities then before me; and I almost involuntarily exclaimed to myself: When shall *I* become conspicuous by my merit? When shall the time approach that the inquisitive eye of inferiority shall single *me* out as one whose works had made him eminent? The answer is in the womb of time. These reflections cast a gloom over the day, which the charms of a good dinner, good wine, good singing, and good company could not dissipate. I left them all before I had taken three glasses of wine, and retired to meditate—havoc, and revenge! such as hope, time, patience, and assiduity will yet accomplish. We dined at the Crown and Anchor, a tavern in the Strand; the room much larger and infinitely more elegant than the new one at the Rotunda*; the dinner sumptuous in

* The Rotunda in Dublin.

the extreme. The company, about four hundred, disposed round four tables—one for the Royal Academicians, the others for the rest of the company. And now I think I have been sufficiently descriptive."

In a letter written in October, 1789, he mentions his introduction to John Opie—an artist whose bold and vigorous pencil has achieved for him a lasting reputation in the highest department of the art,—while the fame of his powerful intellect, shrewd sagacity, and original humour, is preserved, as a social tradition, among the immediate descendants of those contemporaries who had the means of observing and appreciating his many eminent qualities of mind:—qualities of which an uncouth and rugged exterior, and unpolished manners, tended much to impede the discovery, and restrain the acknowledgment, among the casual observers and superficial critics of society. The present generation are perhaps more familiar with the name of Opie, as connected with the literary reputation of his distinguished and accomplished wife, than as recalling the memory of one of the greatest historical painters England has ever produced. But his genius, though inadequately rewarded, was not unrecognised or unhonoured in his own times; and on his death, in the year 1808, the rare homage of a public funeral was awarded to his remains, by the concurrent respect of those who administered the affairs and controlled the destinies of the art in this country.

Among the friends and admirers who followed him to the grave, none had a higher appreciation of his genius and intellect than the subject of this biography, who paid a just and graceful tribute to his memory in some glowing verses which were inserted in the newspapers of the day, and afterwards published, among

other "Occasional Poems," with the "Commemoration of Reynolds."

The feeling which dictated these lines, and which a long and intimate acquaintance with Opie was well calculated to produce, could hardly have been anticipated from Mr. Shee's report of the early impression made on his mind, by the manner and appearance of this great artist on the occasion of their first meeting. "I have," he says, writing to his brother, "been introduced to Mr. Opie, who is, in manners and appearance, as great a clown and as stupid a looking fellow as ever I set my eyes on. Nothing but incontrovertible proof of the fact could force me to think him capable of anything above the sphere of a journeyman carpenter—so little, in this instance, has nature proportioned exterior grace to inward worth. He approved of my copy, and told me (to use his own expression) he would be glad to see me *any time at all.* I intend calling upon him occasionally; for I know him to be a good painter, and notwithstanding appearances are so much against him, he is, I am told, a most sensible and learned man."

We have seen with what feelings of annoyance Mr. Shee had received a suggestion from his friends in Dublin, that he should take steps to make himself known to his cousin, Mr. (afterwards Sir) George Shee, when that gentleman first visited London after his return from the East, and with what satisfaction he had hailed the information obtained in answer to his reluctant inquiries, that "*the Nabob,*" as he jocularly styles him, had taken his departure for Ireland. His Dublin letters, however, during the latter part of the year 1789, effectually served to remove the scruples and apprehensions of his too sensitive pride, as to his intercourse with this more prosperous relative, who, while in Ireland, exhibited

the most friendly interest in the fortunes of his uncle's family, and behaved with great personal kindness to the elder of his two cousins, Mr. Shee's correspondent. Sir George Shee (in whose regard I am obliged, as a matter of convenience, and to avoid confusion, to anticipate the favour of the Crown, his baronetcy not having been conferred until the year 1794) removed to London with his family in the early part of the year 1790, and from that time the correspondence of our young student contains frequent mention of his kinsman "the Nabob," and affords satisfactory proof of that gentleman's anxious desire to promote the professional success of the future President. Many passages to be found in Mr. Shee's letters of this period, bear ample testimony to the existence of this feeling on the part of Sir George, whose efforts in the cause appear to have been stimulated by an early appreciation of his cousin's talents, and accompanied by much judicious advice on subjects connected with his studies and social career.

In February 1790, Mr. Shee writes to his brother as follows: —

"On Monday se'nnight, the Nabob called on me to tell me he was to have Lord Lucan, Lord Inchiquin, Mr. Burke, and a few other people to dinner the Thursday following, and that he would wish to have some pictures of mine at his house to show to them. I accordingly sent them the picture of Mr. Billington, which is one of my best, and also one of the old man, which I exhibited last year. After he went away, I found myself rather ill. On the Saturday following I received a note from him requesting me to go and breakfast with him. I was, however, too ill (in bed) for that, of which I sent him word; and at two o'clock, by which time I had just got up, he called on me. He asked me why I had not sent to let him know I was ill, and wanted to know if I would not have some advice. As I was getting much better, however, I did not think it

advisable. He told me my pictures (to use his own words) were liked most wonderfully, but he would not tell me all that had been said in their praise, lest I should grow vain. Mr. Burke, particularly, who is a man of real taste and judgment, approved of them highly, and said he hoped *his cousin* (meaning me) was an ambitious young man, as then I might hope to do great things. Lord Lucan said he would make Lady Lucan patronise me, and bring her to see my pictures. On the whole, Shee said he had very little doubt that in some little time I should have more than I could well get through. The Nabob called to see me again in the evening, and Mrs. Shee sent me some very fine jelly."

The Mr. Burke here mentioned was the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, to whom, as we have seen, our young artist had brought an ineffectual introduction on his arrival in London eighteen months previously. If the letter of recommendation of which he was the bearer, ever reached the hands of the great orator, it was probably soon forgotten by one who must have been, from his position and character, overwhelmed with epistolary annoyances of that description from friends and acquaintances in Ireland—that eminent and patriotic Irishman being generally looked up to by those among his countrymen who were about to seek their fortunes in England, as their natural patron and protector in the land of "the Saxon."

Whatever may have been the cause of Mr. Burke's oblivion or disregard of the first appeal that had been made to his good offices in favour of his youthful compatriot, the circumstances under which the claims of the latter now came recommended to his notice, were such as to secure a very different result to the friendly interposition employed on behalf of the *aspirant.* It has been stated that some relationship existed between Mr. Burke and Sir George,—whose mother was a

member of the Burke family. Hence the jocular assumption of *cousinship* to our young artist, recorded in the foregoing extract. On the strength of this Hibernian consanguinity, the numerical degree of which it would puzzle the science of a genealogist to fix with heraldic or canonical precision, — but chiefly, no doubt, in compliance with the wishes of Sir George, strongly expressed on the subject, Mr. Burke was now well disposed to afford countenance and encouragement to one who had a sort of collateral claim on his attention, and bade fair to do credit to the efforts that might be made on his behalf. Mr. Burke's well-known and intimate friendship with Sir Joshua Reynolds, naturally suggested to Sir George the idea of obtaining for his young kinsman the personal notice of the President. This suggestion met with a ready acquiescence on the part of Mr. Burke.

It was some time in the spring or summer of 1790, that Mr. Shee accompanied his cousin Sir George, in a visit to Mr. Burke's residence in Gerrard Street, Soho, for the purpose of being presented to that eminent man, as a preliminary step towards an introduction to Sir Joshua. On the details of this first interview with his illustrious countryman, Sir Martin was wont, in after life, to dwell with a feeling of reverential enthusiasm, which long survived the period usually allotted to the intellectual idolatry of ingenuous youth, and was, indeed, the last trace of "hero-worship," that extensive intercourse with the master spirits of the age, during his subsequent career, had allowed to remain in his singularly unprejudiced and clearly-judging mind. Mr. Burke's reception of his young visitor was most friendly, and such as would have fully satisfied the claims of that relationship which, by the liberal application of

some very conventional canons of descent, the great orator was willing to recognise in his case. "Never shall I forget," said Sir Martin, in recalling this passage of his early life—"never shall I forget the flood of eloquence which poured from his lips, as, while holding my hand, and pressing it with affectionate cordiality, he expatiated in glowing terms on the claims and glories of the art to which I was about to devote myself, and sought to kindle my ardour by the prospects of fame and distinction that might be the reward of my exertions, in the honourable career which lay before me."

It is certain that the ambitious and laborious student was not much in want of exhortation on these points. But who can say how often the remembrance of these all but inspired words, from one to whom he looked up with the most profound veneration, may have served, in moments of gloom and discouragement, to reanimate his flagging enthusiasm, and chase from his mind the dark shades of despondency, which would at times spread themselves around him, excluding at once all hope of worldly success, and all practical faith in the existence of his own powers?

The immediate result of this interview with Mr. Burke, was the appointment of a day on which Mr. Shee was to proceed, under his auspices and escort, to wait upon the President. It will be remembered that he had had some communication with Sir Joshua shortly after his arrival in London, on the strength of an introduction from General Cuninghame; and that, for reasons which have been stated, he had not thought himself authorised to treat the acquaintance so commenced as one of a permanent character. He had not therefore made any subsequent attempt to renew his intercourse with Sir Joshua, who had probably for-

gotten his existence, when he once more presented himself in Leicester Square; but, this time, under circumstances which vouched for his social respectability, and were well calculated to secure for him a degree of attention on the part of the President, such as he could hardly reckon on obtaining through any other channel of introduction.

To Sir Joshua, Mr. Burke now personally introduced him as "*a little relation*" of his own; and the never-failing urbanity of the great painter was doubtless further developed on the occasion, by the desire of doing full honour to the warm and earnest recommendation of so highly valued a friend. Nothing could exceed the cordiality of his demeanour towards Mr Burke's *protégé;* but, as it was impossible to form any opinion of the professional chances of the young artist without some acquaintance with his works, the President invited Mr. Shee to breakfast with him on a subsequent day; and it was arranged that he should then bring with him a specimen of his pictorial powers, for the inspection and criticism of his host.

On the appointed day, he duly presented himself in Leicester Square, at the breakfast hour, accompanied by some favourite effort of his pencil, the examination of which Sir Joshua, with a discreet regard for the appetite of his guest, postponed until after the meal. When, at length, with fear and trembling, Mr. Shee removed the covering from the surface of the picture, the quiet but decided tone of approbation in which Sir Joshua delivered his judgment of the work, was fraught with more encouragement to the spirit of the anxious painter, than he could have derived from the unlearned enthusiasm of a host of fanatical *amateurs*. Measured as were the terms of his favourable criticism, the Pre-

sident said more than enough to incite his listener to redoubled exertion, and inspire a reasonable confidence in the result of that perseverance on which he mainly rested his hopes of success. Sir Joshua now inquired whether he had been admitted as a student of the Royal Academy, and, on being answered in the negative, and informed that Mr. Shee had taken no steps with a view to his admission into the schools, suggested the expediency of his at once entering the lists as a candidate for the privileges of a probationer, and gave him the necessary instructions as to the formal proceedings necessary for that purpose. This advice from the head of his profession carried, to Mr. Shee's mind, the weight of a positive command from an authority whose dictates admitted of neither question nor delay in their execution. Overcoming some faint struggles of his pride, which slightly rebelled against the idea of re-entering an arena, the labours and triumphs of which he had, as he thought, practically realised and exhausted in Dublin, he at once resolved to be guided implicitly by the voice of the oracle, and resume, in all meekness and humility, the *routine* occupations of the *status pupillaris*.

Had Sir Joshua been aware of his academic proficiency, he might perhaps have thought it unnecessary to recommend this step, at least with reference to any benefit derivable from the educational course appropriate to the schools of the Antique and Life Academy at Somerset House, where the *port-crayon* was chiefly in requisition. As a draughtsman, Mr. Shee had already attained a degree of skill and correctness in pourtraying the human form, and a spirit and freedom of execution in the use of his materials, which few, if any of the students, his contemporary labourers in the schools of the Royal

Academy, could pretend to rival, and none assuredly could surpass. I believe, indeed, that I do not overrate his just pretensions at this period when I state that with the exception of the gold medal, — a biennial premium reserved for the most successful effort of original composition in the historical line,—the prizes connected with the academic course at Somerset House, were all attainable within a range of exertion too humble in character, and limited in extent, to afford him any inducement to competition.

To return, however, to this memorable morning with Sir Joshua. Sir Martin used to relate what struck him as a singular fact, in reference to the President's deafness, an infirmity which, as is well known, compelled or suggested in his case the constant use of an ear-trumpet. While at breakfast, and during the long protracted interview which accompanied and followed that meal, the conversation with his visitor was carried on in the ordinary tone, without any assistance from the acoustic tube, or any indication of imperfect hearing on the part of Sir Joshua. During the morning, however, they were not unfrequently interrupted by the entrance of a servant, with a message or some communication that required his master's attention and oral reply; and on each of such occasions, the appearance of a third person was the signal for the President to snatch up his trumpet, and resume a look of anxious inquiry and uncertain comprehension befitting the real or supposed defect of his auricular powers. It is, I believe, no uncommon thing for a deaf person to hear better in a *tête-à-tête* colloquy, than when surrounded by the buzz of general conversation in a large party. But in Sir Joshua's case, the contrast seems to have been unusually marked, and calculated to impart a peculiar significancy to

Goldsmith's well-known couplet in the "Retaliation," which winds up his description of the President.

> "When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,
> He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff."

His introduction to Sir Joshua was far from being the only advantage which Mr. Shee derived from his intimacy with the wealthy and prosperous kinsman whose notice he had been so reluctant to court. His letters, written at this period, are full of allusions or details which show the kind interest exhibited by Sir George in his success and advancement. Of this an extract or two from Mr. Shee's home correspondence in the early part of the year 1790, will afford ample evidence:—

To his Brother.

"March 1790.

"· · ·· · I shall now inform you what has since passed between the Indian and me. I dined there on Saturday last, without company, in the family way. They inquired particularly for you, and have been much concerned at your illness. Our conversation was chiefly on painting and music. He seems very much interested for my success in the former, and is constantly recommending me to consider myself as going on in a direct line to be one day *President of the Royal Academy*, and to let nothing divert my attention from *that point*, but to exert all my force for that end; thus always stimulating a disposition already, God knows, sufficiently ambitious. He says there are twelve or thirteen people of his acquaintance that will be ready to sit to me immediately, and that he has the opinion of the *first* and *best* judges in favour of my success, of which *he* has not the smallest doubt."

The record of this judicious and, so to speak, prophetic advice, when considered in reference to its success, and the accomplishment, forty years later, of the

wishes and hopes it implies, cannot be read, at least by those nearly related to the subject of this biography, without a degree of interest to which the circumstances themselves, as they existed at the date of the conversation referred to, are perhaps but little entitled. Success, rapid, brilliant, and permanent, is what parental or family partiality is ever prompt to predict in favour of the youthful votary of any intellectual pursuit which holds out a prospect, however remote and uncertain, of attaining social or official eminence. It may be safely assumed that every ambitious and industrious student who enters his name on the books of any one of our Inns of Court, with a view to being called to the bar, is looked upon by all his nearest connections as having a *vested reversionary interest* in the woolsack; and it is not for want of friendly and sanguine vaticination on the subject, from various quarters, that in his own mind the ultimate attainment of the seals and mace is set down as a mere *remote possibility*. In such matters, however, that which is severally predicted of *all*, must fall true in some individual instances; and where the prediction, so boldly or loosely hazarded, is extant in black and white at the date of its tardy accomplishment, the personal or reflected vanity to whose gratification it has ministered, is naturally ready to see in it the discernment of the philosopher, if not the inspiration of the prophet.

To the Same.

[Same Month.]

"On Tuesday last the Nabob called with another Nabob, a Mr. Howarth, to whom he introduced me, and of whom I yesterday took a first sitting. Shee saw it, and is highly pleased with it, as it is the first picture in which he has had an opportunity of judging of a likeness of mine. I dined yesterday

with A——; where I met the Chevalier O'Gorman, an old Irish gentleman, who has been a long time settled in France. He has dived much into the antiquities of Ireland, and in the course of his researches, has met with an antique record under the great seal, so far back as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, proving the arms and descent of the Shees, and containing the titles of all the *estates* that had been in the family. Judging this would be rather a treat to the family vanity of my cousin, I requested A—— would get him a peep at it; and I was just going out of the door to call on the Nabob, when I met him coming to me. . . . . Shee seemed quite happy at the idea of seeing this remnant of antiquity; and I am to call on him to-morrow morning, to take him to St. James's Place to see it. He made me promise to dine with him."

About this time, he received, one morning, a visit from an elderly gentleman of distinguished appearance and gracefully *patronising* demeanour, whose name, from some accidental cause, was not announced to him, but whose evident acquaintance with our student's ancestral and paternal *antécédens*, proclaimed him at once as an ancient ally of the family.

This personage examined the pictures which Mr. Shee submitted to his inspection, with much apparent interest, and honoured them by a dignified approval; he made minute inquiries concerning the other members of "his old friend Martin Shee's family," and took leave with the most courteous and liberal professions of good will and anxiety to render the young painter every service in his power.

The tone of the conversation, and the allusions to a former intimacy with his beloved father, had much excited Mr. Shee's curiosity. But, naturally diffident and sensitive, he had shrunk from the awkwardness of putting a direct interrogatory as to the name of his visitor, who consequently left him in ignorance on this

important point. A few days later, however, he met the gentleman in question walking with his cousin Sir George, and from him soon ascertained the fact that his new acquaintance was Lord Lucan, formerly Sir Charles Bingham, a name familiar to Mr. Shee as that of a county Mayo neighbour and friend of his father, in early and prosperous days. Lord Lucan was, at this time, a person of considerable social position even in England, and much connected with those circles of aristocracy, political, courtly, and intellectual, whose favourable notice often creates, and always helps to sustain, the most brilliant reputations in art, science, and literature. Offers of service from such a quarter were calculated to excite cheering, if not ambitious, hopes in a moderately sanguine disposition. But Mr. Shee was little prone to attach undue importance to such emphatic demonstrations of interest in his behalf. Certain it is that, had he indulged in any anticipations of success or patronage in connection with the noble lord's assurances of regard, he would have experienced a woeful disappointment; for an occasional ceremonious and much professing visit to his *studio*, was the extent of all the attention or notice he ever received from this influential personage, during an acquaintance of some years' continuance.

There was also another county Mayo friend of the family, who was induced to extend the light of his countenance to the youthful and struggling artist, after nearly the same fashion, and with precisely the same result. This was the Earl of Altamont, afterwards the first Marquess of Sligo. Lord Altamont was remarkable for a degree of obesity not unusual in this branch of the noble family of Browne; and Sir Martin used to give rather a ludicrous description of his lordship's first visit

to him, when, followed by his brother, Mr. Denis Browne, a man still fatter than himself, he slowly emerged, *stern foremost*, from his carriage, and wound his way up the narrow staircase with deliberate caution and ponderous gait,—and on making his wheezing and *puffing entrée* into the *studio*, from the windows of which Mr. Shee had been watching with great curiosity the painful process of extracting his two portly visitors from their vehicle, apostrophised the astonished artist in the following style:—"Well, sir, you see all the trouble I am giving myself to come and see you!" and thereupon followed the announcement of his name and quality, with sundry professions of good will, and much display of those ancestral sympathies, whose genial warmth seemed likely to foster into a rapid blaze, the nascent spark of the young painter's hitherto unfriended genius.

But, alas! As it was with the kindly reminiscences of the house of Bingham, even so was it with the soft memories of the house of Browne; and these gratifying evidences of the talismanic influence of genealogical feeling proved, in both cases, "*Vox et prætereà nihil!*"

These details, however trifling in themselves, are perhaps worth recording, as tending to individualise the social and mental position of our young artist, at this period, and communicating something of *couleur locale* to the oft-repeated tale of early struggles, hopes, and disappointments, common to all who embark in active professional life.

No serious blame is, of course, intended to be cast on the memory of these highly respectable noblemen, for not more actively exerting themselves in favour of one whose powers were at that period, to a great extent, undeveloped, and whose claims upon their

notice were not such as the practical portion of mankind would rate at a very high estimate.

But the Irish, from the peer to the peasant, are a demonstrative people, with enthusiastic impulses of greater warmth than permanency—easily professing to-day, and often with perfect sincerity, what they will as readily forget to-morrow; profuse, when pleased or interested, for the moment, in praise and promises, without always duly weighing the extent or availability of those sterling resources, which that courtly currency affects to pledge, and is therefore presumed to represent. Had Mr. Shee been born and bred to the north of the Tweed, and the noble earls in question been ornaments of the Scottish instead of the Irish peerage, we may fairly conjecture that, *cæteris paribus*, his chances of powerful patronage and rapid advancement would have been multiplied tenfold. It is no satirical reflection on our northern neighbours to say, that to a young man of talent and energy who has his way to make in the world, and is wholly dependent on his own exertions, it is a great misfortune not to have been born a Scotchman.

To his Brother.

"March 1790.

. . . . . .

"I had last Saturday a visit from the Countess Spencer*, a great proficient in the art, and a most formidable critic. She was pleased, however, to express some approbation, which was more than I expected, as there is not a being on earth so difficult to be pleased, or half so uncharitably severe as a female *connoisseur*. Before she left the room she pronounced the cruel sentence of '*absolutely bad*' on a fine picture of Hamilton's

* Lavinia, wife of the second Earl Spencer, a lady of great talent and rare intellectual acquirements. She was a daughter of the first Earl of Lucan.

which I have copied for Macklin. My copy she, however, praised much, and said I had *judiciously corrected* the faults of the original. Going away she assured me she considered me as a very promising young man, for which you may suppose I was most humbly *thankful.* Lord Lucan, who attended her, told me Lady Lucan intended paying me a visit immediately."

The prosperous and already brilliant career of Mr. Lawrence, to which frequent allusion is made in Mr. Shee's correspondence at this period, in the candid and generous spirit which ever characterised his feelings towards his competitors in the struggle for fame, was apparently not viewed by his friends in Ireland with the same degree of equanimity. Some disparaging notice of this fortunate rival, in a letter from Dublin, would seem to have called forth the observations contained in the early part of the following extract. I feel a double pleasure in recording them, as they are creditable alike to the memory of Sir Martin, and to that of his distinguished and amiable predecessor in the chair of the Royal Academy.

To his Brother.

April 1700.

. . . . .

"I cannot conceive who could have so much misinformed you about Lawrence. He is the very reverse of what he has been represented, bears an excellent character, and is the entire support of his father and family. He is modest, genteel, and unaffected, by no means inclined to dissipation, and one of the most laborious, industrious men in his profession that ever practised it.

"When you add to this that he has the first abilities in his line, and is perhaps, one of the handsomest young men you have ever seen, you will probably conclude his situation to be rather enviable. I should be sorry to think, however, that envy, in this case, had any influence with me. I consider him as highly

meriting every encouragement he has or can meet with, and only regret that I am not equally deserving of success. Do not imagine, however, that I despair. That passion has never yet found its way into my breast, and I have not more reason now to adopt it. I have had since I came to London, many disadvantages to encounter, and must still, till time and perseverance shall do them away, and enable me to give an undivided attention where 'tis so much requisite. Johnstone* sits this day, and sits again to-morrow, when I hope to finish the picture, and have it ready to send in to the Academy on Wednesday next. . . . . Remember me most affectionately to my aunt and little ones. Tell her I wish her a happy, happy Easter, and hope next Sunday she will think of me as often as I think of her. I am very happy to find Greene† is getting on so nobly. I never had any doubt of his success; for he has the first requisites—abilities and application."

Mr. Shee was at this time in expectation of the speedy arrival in London, of the brother to whom the foregoing letters were addressed, and who, in timing his visit so as to witness the opening of the Exhibition at Somerset House, was no doubt eagerly and joyfully anticipating the professional triumph of his brother's pencil on the walls of the Royal Academy. A woeful disappointment, however, not unattended with severe mortification to our young artist, was destined to meet this affectionate relative on his arrival. It appears, indeed, by a letter written a few days after that from which the above extracts have been taken, that the pictures, four in number, which Mr. Shee had been industriously and anxiously preparing for the Exhibition,

* Irish Johnstone, the celebrated comedian.

† Mr. Greene, of the Irish bar, afterwards Sir Jonas Greene, Recorder of Dublin, one of Sir Martin's early and most intimate friends. He was the father of that eminent lawyer, the present Baron Greene of the Court of Exchequer in Ireland.

had passed the formidable ordeal of the council. "I think," he says, "I told you in my last of having sent the pictures to the Royal Academy, and of Johnstone being one of them. On Wednesday I found they were received. The pictures sent in this year have been numerous beyond any former Exhibition, which, of course, swelled the list of exclusions a good deal. Some of my unfortunate countrymen are of the number. It opens for the inspection of the public the twenty-eighth of this month."

Secure on the point of their reception, his only anxiety was as to the position of his pictures in the arrangement of the Exhibition by the "hanging committee." What then must have been his mortification, on entering the rooms at Somerset House, on the first day when the public were admitted, to find that his pictures were nowhere to be seen, and that his name did not appear in the catalogue! Although saved from the ignominy of absolute rejection, these works, four in number, — the produce of so much toil and care, — on which his hopes of public notice mainly rested, had failed to attract sufficient attention on the part of the official "hangmen" to rescue even one of them from the mortifying destiny that, each succeeding year, in too many instances, awaits the productions of laborious mediocrity, and, sometimes, perhaps, of unobtrusive merit,— exclusion from want of space.

It is no easy matter to estimate, at its full degree of annoyance, the effect of such an incident on the hopes and energies of a young artist, whose position and temperament combined to render him more than usually sensitive to the reality or appearance of failure in his professional efforts. The arrival of his brother, for whose presence and companionship in London he had

been long anxiously looking, and who came but to find him smarting under the infliction of this *academic outrage*, — as all young painters so circumstanced insist on considering it, — added no little poignancy to his feelings of mortification. Such mischances, necessarily of frequent occurrence among the junior ranks of the art, have but too often supplied, and will, probably, still continue to supply, the groundwork of that deep and inveterate enmity to the Royal Academy, which stimulates the zeal of its professional and non-professional assailants. There were not wanting those who, in the case of Mr. Shee, would, for their own interested purposes, have gladly fanned the spark of his temporary indignation into a fierce and steady blaze of hostility against the offending institution.

Among that section of the press which assumes the critical function in reference to works of art, and often seeks to avenge its own literary obscurity or incompetence, by attacking the more distinguished and prosperous votaries of the kindred pursuit, the concurrence and aid of some professional artist is absolutely essential to secure that amount of technical accuracy, without which the most envenomed darts of hostile criticism would fall pointless. The artist, therefore, who finds or fancies himself aggrieved, by the tardiness of the Academy or the public, in the recognition of those claims which his self-love prompts him to rate at a high value, can in most cases easily find vent for his *splendida bilis*, in the columns of some daily or periodical paper, ever ready to attack the Academy as a close corporation and a scene of corrupt jobbery, and eager to damage the social and official position of individual members who take part in its administration. In those columns, his necessary familiarity with the technical phrases, and assumed

knowledge of the principles and history of his art, will be of important use in giving point to the malevolence of others, even if he should lack the literary talent which would do justice to his own; and if he cannot himself direct the operations and construct the batteries of the assailing force, he may at least superintend their ammunition, and serve their guns with considerable effect.

As Mr. Shee's literary tastes and general acquirements could hardly escape the notice of the most casual observer who was thrown into his society—and chance had early brought him into contact with some of the minor fry of periodical literature—it is no wonder that on the occurrence of what might be plausibly construed into a grievance in his regard, the recruiting officers of the anti-academic legion were on the alert to enlist him under their banners. But although keenly alive to the sense of neglect, he had too humble an opinion of his own powers to indulge a feeling of lasting resentment, on the score of mortifications which he was far from considering wholly undeserved; nor indeed was his a mind which could, under any circumstances, have found in his own personal wrongs, real or assumed, a motive for assailing the existence, or attacking the general policy, of an institution which he would on other grounds have viewed with respect. To distrust and analyse his own motives, when tempted to animadvert with severity on the conduct, or act in opposition to the proceedings of others, was a rule of caution and conscience to which he ever strove to adhere; and although not deficient in energy or sternness in the use of his pen, when called upon, as he conceived, to assert an invaded right or repel an unjust aggression, on behalf of those interests which were committed to his charge, or

entrusted to his advocacy, he never employed the powers of that pen against an adversary or an assailant, except on some ground of clear and substantial principle to which no sense of personal injury, on his part, gave a fictitious or undue importance.

The presence in London of his brother, to whom the foregoing letters are addressed, necessarily interrupted the course of his home correspondence; and although that correspondence was resumed and carried on with undiminished activity, on Mr. George Shee's return to Dublin before the winter of the same year, our extracts from the subsequent letters addressed to him, will be fewer and more brief. As Mr. Shee gradually attained a more fixed position, and extended the range of his social connections in London, his life, although generally uneventful, begins to present a variety of details more or less worthy of attention, that are unnoticed in letters often confined to subjects of purely domestic interest, and dealing as much with the hopes and prospects of others, as with his own. This portion of his biography may not inappropriately close with the statement of his admission as a student of the Royal Academy in the month of November, 1790.

CHAPTER IV.

1790—1796.

French Principles and *Philosophy*.—Regeneration of Mankind.—Schools of the Royal Academy.—A distinguished Family.—A Continental Cousin.—The Duchesse d'Abrantes on the *Shee Pedigree*.—Death of Sir J. Reynolds.—His Literary Claims.—Mr. Lawrence appointed Serjeant-Painter.—A Private Debating Society.—Sharon Turner.—Sir A. Carlisle.—Ascetic Economy.—The Recruiting-Serjeants of Critical Literature.—Academic Grievances.—Literary and Critical Début.—Despondency.—Brightening Prospects.—Sir W. Addington.—A successful Stratagem.—Great Advance in Public Favour.

THE course of Mr. Shee's life, during the next four or five years, offers but few events of interest to the pen of the biographer. The progress of patient toil, and the gradual advancement in public favour which that period exhibits, present little beyond the ordinary and trival incidents of mental exertion and scantily remunerated labour, of which the early history of every professional career affords abundant examples. The strict economy of his habits, and his resolute spirit of self-denial, enabled him to struggle manfully and successfully against the annoyances attendant on straitened means; while, in his hours of recreation, chiefly devoted to pursuits of a highly intellectual character, he was often cheered and encouraged by the society of a few equally ambitious and not less earnest votaries of fame, whose ardour and emulation in the cause of knowledge, would have supplied a powerful stimulus to the studies of one more in need of example to urge him onward in the path of improvement.

Although sincerely devoted to his art, and taking the greatest delight in the exercise of his pencil, he was

scarcely less eager in his anxiety to cultivate his literary powers, and render himself conspicuous for general information. It is somewhat remarkable that while his attendance at the Academy was diligent and regular, and his proficiency in the studies there pursued such as to command the admiration of his fellow-students, and elicit unusual commendation from the official superintendents of the different schools to which he was successively admitted with great rapidity, he appears to have formed but few intimacies among the *alumni* of the institution. All his most cherished associates, at this period of his life, were young men engaged in other professions, who could boast but a scanty acquaintance with art, and felt but little interest in subjects immediately connected with its theory or practice. The more exciting fields of politics and *philosophy*,—as the dominant French school designated their wild and fantastic speculations,—furnished in these volcanic and convulsionary times, the engrossing topics which set every ardent spirit and active brain, among the youth of the day, at work to re-construct the edifice of society, upon principles of wisdom and virtue theretofore undiscovered by the moralist and the legislator: and although, in our sober-minded community, the anti-social jargon and bombastic cant of revolutionary France found but a faint and partial echo in the hearts of the most enthusiastic among our youthful regenerators of mankind, the intellectual impulse given to the reflective mind of England, by the stirring events which were passing elsewhere, was clearly manifested in a bolder tone of discussion and a wider range of speculative inquiry, on all moral, social, and political questions, than would have been tolerated by the prescriptive proprieties of an earlier generation.

Nor is it to be supposed that the fancy for sweeping political change was confined to those, who, having nothing to lose in the existing state of things, looked forward, with sanguine expectation, to the chances of a scramble in which they might possibly find something to gain. The gigantic abuses and scandals which, in a neighbouring state, but too surely prepared the way for the terrible revolution that ensued, although ineffectual in the eyes of reasonable men to palliate the enormities and absurdities which marked its progress, had gone far to discredit the monarchical principle itself, in the minds of the majority of hasty and shallow reasoners: and even the interests of constitutional royalty, of which at that time England afforded the sole, as it still affords the best and brightest example, were not safe from the indiscriminate censure cast upon institutions, whose theory was readily identified with the results of their corrupt administration.

"French principles," as they were called, made, or appeared to make, considerable progress, even among that class of youthful philosophers, "*Quibus est pater, et equus, et res.*" It might be, indeed, that few of those so circumstanced would have been willing to bring their cherished theories to the test of practice. But, in the meantime, the profession of an enlightened and expansive liberalism, which looked upon kings as a remnant of barbarism, and priests as the hired agents of imposture,—necessary evils, the existence of which was to be contemptuously submitted to, until the empire of truth and reason should be more widely extended among the benighted millions,—was decidedly the intellectual fashion with the "ingenuous youth" of the day. The avowal of a robust faith in revelation and a staunch attachment to the monarchy, required, on the

part of a young man, an amount of moral courage, even superior to that which, in our day, would venture to call in question the social propriety of the cigar, or confess an unwillingness to encounter the risks of a "good run" across a "stiff country."

But in the midst of much that was mischievous, and more that was absurd, in the prevailing notions by which the rising generation were morally affected, it cannot be denied that the discussion of abstract principles, and the spirit of political and historical investigation, necessarily called into action by the philosophical tendencies or pretensions to which I have referred, had a powerful effect in sharpening the intellect, and exercising the mental capacities of those who busied themselves in the speculations of political science. As advancing years and practical experience of life gradually suggested and increased the distrust of those specious theories, which had once appeared so reasonable, they reaped an unlooked-for benefit from intellectual exercises, undertaken and carried on with far different views and feelings. Many a distinguished gladiator in the arena of public life, in the early part of this century, has owed his argumentative triumphs in the cause of political wisdom or virtue, to the keen edge and the skilful use of weapons originally whetted and wielded in the service of an exploded and obsolete sophistry.

As might be expected, the companions and intellectual associates of Mr. Shee, at this exciting period, included many who were not wholly free from the prevailing political and social heresies that scared the sober portion of our isle from its propriety. But there was in the mind and character of our young artist, a certain steadiness and solidity,—a freedom

from impressionable weakness,—which supplied unusual powers of resistance against the attraction of those captivating theories that challenged the ready assent of many equally upright, but less reflective minds.

Although brought up, in infancy and early boyhood, in an atmosphere of traditional loyalty, such as our essentially practical generation can neither appreciate nor comprehend,—and attached by conviction, as well as by the force of precept and example, to the principles of that faith which has ever been the favourite object of assault, with the partisans of social and philosophical "progress,"—he was equally free from political and religious intolerance; and, indeed, as an almost inevitable result of the temper of the times acting on a generous and independent spirit, his opinions were early and strongly tinged by liberalism, in the most practical and constitutional sense of that term, as at present understood. But so far was he from satisfying all the requirements of that *soi-disant* philosophical school, which claimed the majority of the youth of the day as its disciples, that by many among his ardent and visionary associates, he was stigmatised as an *aristocrat* in feeling and principle, and looked upon as very far in arrear of the advanced and enlightened views of the day. Meanwhile, as time rolled on, and the youthful theorists who had deplored his shortcomings, underwent, one by one, the edifying political transformation which growing experience of life and increasing worldly prosperity were so well calculated to effect,—passing, in some instances, by a very common and abrupt transition, from the character of the fierce democrat, to that of the *ultra tory*,—he alone remained, if not absolutely stationary in his political principles, at least unshaken as to their general tendency and bearing.

As, at the outset of life, he had never been carried away by the rage for revolutionary innovation, so, to the end, he was never disposed to advocate or defend the existence of abuses, which he thought capable of being removed or remedied without endangering the solid framework of the constitution.

Perhaps the nature of his profession and intellectual tastes contributed to guard him from the contagion of violent Jacobinism. Republicanism, as interpreted by the regenerating theorists of that period, indicated a phase of social and civil existence, offering but little encouragement to the kindred pursuits of painting and poetry. It proscribed, with a most anathematising spirit, a host of tender, holy, gallant, and chivalrous associations and feelings, in which the sister arts, in their highest and purest development, have ever found a ready inspiration. No one gifted with the poetic temperament, or capable of enjoying the brightest triumphs of art, could heartily sympathise with the views of those who, in their real or simulated indignation at the social abuses co-existent with certain aspects of civilization, proposed the subversion of society itself, by the agency of theories that practically degraded mankind to the level of the beasts that perish.

In the meantime, however, the frequent discussion of extreme opinions which engaged the little intellectual circle in which Mr. Shee's hours of relaxation were chiefly spent, sharpened the faculties of all for the keen encounter of wit, on whichever side of the arena they might be arrayed. Much of that graceful flow of correct language, and ready acuteness in argument, for which, in after years, Sir Martin was socially distinguished, may perhaps be traced to the practice of careful, earnest, and systematised controversy on the

stirring questions of the day, in politics, or philosophy, which he and some of his friends established and persevered in during several years, for the avowed purpose of mutual improvement in the development of their mental and oratorical powers.

I shall presently have a few words to say respecting the individuals of whom this chosen society was composed, whose names will, in more than one instance, justify a passing allusion to their intellectual and social relations with the subject of this biography.

In the latter part of the year 1790, and shortly after his admission as a student of the Royal Academy, Mr. Shee removed from Craven Street into much more spacious and suitable apartments in Jermyn Street, St. James's. This was a rather auspicious locality; for one of his predecessors, if not his immediate predecessor, in the occupation of the rooms, was no other than the rising leader of the British School of Art, his admired and successful competitor, Lawrence.

His progress from the Antique or Plaster Academy (as it is called) to the Life Academy, or School of the Living Model, was, I believe, as rapid as the regulations of the institution would admit; and in the latter department he was an assiduous attendant. The hours allotted to this branch of the academic course were then and (if I mistake not) still are, from six to eight in the evening; an arrangement which leaves the student at liberty to devote the whole of his day to the practice of his profession in his own *studio*. This evening attendance supplies an effectual test of diligence; as, if regularly observed, it probably involves the sacrifice of many social and convivial engagements, in which that particular period of the twenty-four hours, or some portion of it, would necessarily be in-

cluded. This was more obviously the case, at the date to which our biography now refers, when the ordinary dinner-hour in London, was much earlier than it is at present.

In the room devoted to the living model, the undraped subject of study is placed by the academician-visitor on duty, in some fixed attitude, calculated, according to the judgment of that functionary, to develop muscular action, or display symmetry of form in a picturesque and artistically-useful aspect. Rows of benches, for the accommodation of the students, are arranged in horse-shoe form round the model, the back row being raised so as to admit of the students who occupy that position obtaining a good view of the model over the heads of the front row. When the figure is first "set," as it is technically called, each student, in the order of his arrival, has the choice of a place from which to make his sketch or drawing. This position, once taken up, is considered as belonging to him *de jure*, on every evening during which the model retains the attitude; and although he may be tardy in his arrival on any given evening, he runs no risk of finding his place occupied.

It was during his first season of study in the Life Academy, that Mr. Shee had occasion to observe with surprise that, for many successive evenings, although he was regular and early in his attendance, his drawing-board and other necessary materials were always arranged carefully in his place, ready for immediate use, before his arrival. After having several times profited by this thoughtful solicitude for his academic comfort, on the part of some member of the little community, in which he was still a stranger, without any well-established social relations, he at length inquired of one of his neighbours in the

school, to which of his fellow-students he was indebted for so obliging an attention. "It is young Porter," was the reply; his informant at the same time pointing out a very intelligent-looking and gentlemanlike lad of about twelve or thirteen years of age, whose child-like appearance among a number of artists who had mostly arrived at man's estate, had already attracted the notice and excited the curiosity of his new *confrère*. This discovery naturally led to an acquaintance between Mr. Shee and his youthful fellow-student, who proved as engaging in manners and amiable in disposition as he was prepossessing in appearance, and remarkable for an extraordinary precocity of talent in the pursuit to which he had so early devoted himself, in which, as is evident from his advanced position in the schools of the Royal Academy, he had already attained a degree of proficiency extremely rare at his age.

The clever, lively, and affectionate boy soon became warmly attached to one whose society was in every respect calculated to stimulate his industry, and contribute to his moral and intellectual improvement. He begged earnestly to be allowed to introduce his new acquaintance to his mother and sisters, who were residing in lodgings in a quiet and inexpensive part of the town. It was not without some scruples as to the propriety of intruding on these ladies, under the auspices of so very juvenile a master of the ceremonies, that Mr. Shee at length consented to accompany his young friend home to tea, one evening, after their two hours' study in the Life Academy. He was received with cordial and graceful politeness by Mrs. Porter, a widow lady of the most amiable manners, and her two daughters, who were in the first bloom of youth, and

possessed of great personal attractions. "Never," would he say, when describing, in after years, his first glimpse of the youngest of these sisters, as he discovered her, on his entrance into their small and humble sitting-room, seated in deep and earnest study of some favourite author: "Never did I see any living face, the outline and expression of which bore so strong a resemblance to the Venus de' Medici." From that quiet and sociable evening dated a friendship with that amiable and afterwards highly-distinguished family, which terminated only with the life of its last survivor. The youngest of these fair and gifted sisters was the future authoress of "Thaddeus of Warsaw," Jane Porter; the elder, her equally eminent sister, Anna Maria Porter. The youthful artist, their brother, was destined to attain great and varied distinction in the course of an honourable and adventurous career, as a painter, an author, a soldier, and a diplomatist, under the well-known name of Sir Robert Ker Porter.

It was in the early part of the year 1791 that Mr. Shee made the acquaintance of another individual of little note at that period, but of great subsequent celebrity, under circumstances which gave a peculiar interest to the reminiscences of their brief intercourse. It will be recollected that about that time, the Duke of Orleans (Philippe *Égalité*), having not only incurred the displeasure of the French court by his factious and treasonable encouragement of the revolutionary party,—then hastening with rapid strides to the subversion of all the institutions of the country,—but being also in very indifferent odour with the leaders of the movement, who naturally distrusted the sincerity of his republican predilections, deemed it advisable, in obedience, as it was thought, to a hint from his royal

cousin, Louis XVI., to absent himself from Paris, and pay one of his not unfrequent visits to England, where his intimacy with the Prince of Wales secured for him a more respectful reception from the *élite* of London society, than the rumours of his political heresies—which had not failed to precede him—might otherwise have allowed him to experience. He was accompanied on this visit by his private secretary, Colonel Shee, a French officer of Irish extraction, whose family, settled in France for a generation or two, unquestionably traced their origin to the same Kilkenny ancestors from whom Sir Martin's branch, as we have seen, derive their descent. Colonel Shee, who was a man of a certain age, had brought over with him a young nephew of the name of Clarke, also a Frenchman by birth, although of Irish or British descent in both the male and female lines, his mother being the sister of Colonel Shee. Mr. Clarke was not himself in personal attendance on the Duke of Orleans, and was, therefore, under the necessity of *lionising* London in the more quiet manner suitable to a stranger of moderate means and position. Mr. A——, the ingenious and somewhat enigmatical adventurer, to whose proceedings I have already referred, being, as I have said, on terms of intimacy with the subordinate staff of the "Prince's set," became, through that channel, acquainted with young Clarke, to whom he had been recommended as a person able and willing to do the honours of London to him during his short stay here.

Aware that Mr. Shee spoke French with a facility more rare in those days than in our time, A—— very gladly transferred to him the duties of *cicerone*, by introducing his continental cousin, who could not speak a word of English, and on the strength of the remote

consanguinity, very emphatically paraded for the edification of both parties, requesting Mr. Shee to accompany him on his sight-seeing rambles. This good office, Mr. Shee, with all due ancestral sympathies, willingly undertook, and performed to the entire satisfaction of the stranger, to whose service he devoted himself for two or three days, and whom he found to be an intelligent, gentlemanlike, and amiable young man, singularly quiet and unassuming in his manners.

As the political events that shortly after ensued between the two countries were such as to put an end to all friendly communication between those whose social lot was cast on opposite sides of the channel, no further intercourse took place between Mr. Shee and his foreign kinsman, after the latter returned to Paris; and it was with the greatest astonishment that some eighteen or twenty years later, Mr. Shee was apprised of the identity of his mild and unpretending acquaintance of the year 1791, with Napoleon's celebrated but not very popular war-minister, the Duke de Feltre.

It would seem that in the midst of the substantial and unforeseen splendours of that exalted rank, to which the chances of a stirring period, and the favour of his imperial master had raised him, Monsieur Clarke was not altogether oblivious of the more shadowy glories derived from the traditionary greatness of his pedigree on the mother's side. This is, at least, a fair inference from a passage in the amusing memoirs of the Duchesse d'Abrantes, in which that lively and rather cynical authoress makes the Duke de Feltre the subject of her *piquante* satire, as an individual puffed up with vanity, and constantly assuming a tone of aristocratic and princely superiority on the strength of his alleged descent from "*je ne sais quels roitelets d'Irlande.*" The literary duchess might,

however, have dealt more leniently with the ancestral weaknesses of her brother *parvenu* grandee, in a work where she sets out by endeavouring to establish her own descent from the imperial *Comneni!*

It was, I believe, in the exhibition of the year 1791, that Mr. Shee submitted to the notice of the public his first whole length picture. This was the portrait of a gentleman in a kind of hussar uniform, the details of which, although strictly military in character, were not capable of being identified with the regulation equipments of any corps to be found in the British or any other army list. The work had sufficient merit to obtain from the "hanging committee" a very conspicuous place in the great room; and there is little doubt that the artist was indebted to the impression it made, for a sensible increase of public notice, as it was a singularly fine subject, treated with skill, spirit, and good taste.

The year 1792, was rendered memorable in the history of the arts in England, by the death of the distinguished head of the English school, and President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Nor was it the art alone that sustained a loss in the person of this great painter. His social qualifications were such as to shed an additional lustre on the high office to which the common voice of his profession, far more than the favour of his sovereign, had originally raised him. While the vigour of his pencil, the grace and purity of his style, and the richness of his colouring, sustained the character of British art, and vindicated his pre-eminence on the walls of the Royal Academy, the position he occupied in the world was far from being restricted to that species of social popularity, however flattering and honourable,

which transcendent talents in any conspicuous department of human exertion, will generally secure for its possessor. It was not solely as the greatest living painter in Europe, that he was the chosen friend and associate of Burke, Johnson, and Goldsmith. While unrivalled in his peculiar pursuit, in which they were but scantily qualified to judge of his merits, he met them, on a footing approaching to equality, on their own ground, and trod with ease and credit their accustomed paths in the regions of literature, science, and philosophy.

The world,—generally unwilling to give one man credit for pre-eminent talent in two separate pursuits,—while unable to dispute the literary merit which shines conspicuous in the discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds, is fond of asserting or assuming that he was greatly assisted in their authorship by Johnson and Burke. To any one familiar with the peculiar style of either of these two great masters of English composition, the theory is nearly as self-refuting, as it must ever appear to the practised artist or scientific *connoisseur*. If Johnson, as is well known, could not restrain the sonorous and somewhat turgid grandiloquence of his style, while penning a note or letter to an acquaintance on the most common-place subject, he could hardly have failed to betray his sesquipedalian redundance of phraseology, when "airing his vocabulary" in the regions of "high art." Nor would the less artificial, but not less striking and impressive periods of Burke, with all their passionate energy and vivid flash of genius, have been more easily schooled down to the unpretending, though graceful and correct, simplicity that so much enhances the sound reasoning and instructive precepts of the academic Discourses. But in

truth, the nature of the work itself affords a satisfactory refutation of the popular error. The power of clothing the thoughts of another man in a garb peculiar to your own, is a faculty the exercise of which involves, as a preliminary condition, the perfect understanding of what is passing in *his* mind, as connected with the subject in hand, and the views which he seeks to urge on the judgment of those whom he professes to instruct or enlighten. A theoretic, at least, if not a practical, familiarity with the topics discussed, is essential to enable the exponent of another's opinion, to perform his vicarious task in a manner that shall prove—I do not merely say luminous or effective—but even barely intelligible, to the reader or student.

Had Dumont been himself a stranger to the sciences of political economy and metaphysics, when he undertook the office of interpreter between the oracular wisdom of Jeremy Bentham and the confiding hero-worship of an utilitarian generation, the easy-flowing French of that dragoman of democratic philosophy would have found as few readers, as the rugged English through which the divine *afflatus* was originally manifested to the bewildered sense of the disciples, by the once famous heresiarch of the moral and political world. In like manner, as Burke and Johnson were confessedly unskilled in the practice and theory of painting, and necessarily unfamiliar with its technical phraseology, they were alike incapable of supplying appropriate language and expression to ideas which, however clear and vivid in the painter's brain, found no distinct reflex in their minds. That the turn of a sentence, or the structure of a paragraph, may have been, in some instances, improved by judicious criticism on the part of one or other of these experienced and accomplished writers, is

doubtless no unreasonable conjecture. But the theory which lends to this friendly interference, an action and extent incompatible with Reynolds's fair claims as an original author, is about as reasonable as that which would ascribe to Macaulay or Lingard, the literary merit of Dr. Arnott's admirable treatise on Physics.

The mortal remains of Sir Joshua were honoured by a public funeral; and Mr. Shee was one of only four students of the Royal Academy who formed part of the academic *cortège*, and followed their illustrious President to his last earthly resting-place in St. Paul's cathedral. His obsequies were attended by a numerous array of rank and talent, comprising the most distinguished names in the social, political, and literary world. Mr. Burke, the most valued and beloved of his friends, was a conspicuous figure among the mourners; and there was no circumstance of that impressive ceremonial which dwelt with such permanent distinctness in Sir Martin's memory, as the intense grief depicted in the countenance and demeanour of the great orator and philosopher, when the last sad rites were in progress over the coffin of Reynolds.

The scene was in itself well calculated to stimulate the ambition of even a less ardent and energetic votary of the art than Mr. Shee; and as he looked round on that solemn and imposing assemblage, met together for the purpose of paying the last tribute of respect to departed genius and the high social position by which its efforts had been rewarded, perhaps, in spite of the despondent humility with which he habitually estimated his own prospects, the thought may have obtruded itself, that *he* too might one day achieve similar distinction while living, and entitle himself to a similar measure of observance when dead.

While aspiring to the honoured chair of Reynolds, as

the highest point of his worldly and professional ambition, he was no less anxious to emulate the social merits and accomplishments of that great artist. This feeling exhibits itself in more than one passage of his correspondence during this period. In a letter to his brother written in the summer of the same year, he says, in reference to Sir Joshua's career :—

"The observing eye might turn from his works to contemplate himself, and find yet more to approve and esteem. This it was which yet more than even his great professional superiority, threw his contemporaries at so vast a distance, and raised him to so enviable a pre-eminence in public estimation. In his track, though at ever so great and discouraging a distance, I feel ambitious to proceed. The very idea, may, perhaps, not unjustly be deemed vanity and presumption. But to you I communicate my thoughts as free and unreserved as I view them in my own imagination; and I have, at least, this to say in my defence, that though we may aim far beyond our reach, we may probably gain something by the exertion."

It will be seen by one or two other extracts from his family letters, that however scanty may have been the measure of his pecuniary success up to this point, he was rapidly advancing towards professional eminence in the estimation of his brother artists.

The office of state painter, formerly designated in red-book phraseology as "Serjeant-Painter to the King," which Sir Joshua had held since the death of Allan Ramsay, was, on the President's decease, conferred on Mr. Lawrence; a distinction for which he was, no doubt, mainly indebted to the friendship of the courtly patrons who interested themselves in his success. But, young as he was, his merits as an artist, and the acknowledged position he occupied among the portrait painters of the

day, were such as fully to justify his appointment. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that Sir Joshua was succeeded in the chair of the Royal Academy by Benjamin West, whose name stood high as a painter of history, and who, with the personal favour of King George III., enjoyed the nominal rank of historical painter to his Majesty, and a salary or allowance of 1000*l.* *per annum* from the privy purse, in that capacity. The office of Serjeant-Painter, or painter in ordinary, was, however, the only recognised appointment on the royal household, connected with the arts. But as its duties were essentially connected with the functions of the portrait painter, the place could not have been appropriately filled by the newly-appointed President.

To the first exhibition which took place after his nomination as court painter, Mr. Lawrence contributed *inter alia*, a portrait of the king, painted, no doubt, in the discharge of his official duties. In this annual display, Mr. Shee was also a not undistinguished exhibitor, though under less profitable and far less prominent circumstances. He exhibited a whole length of Lewis the comedian, in the character of the Marquis, in the play of "The Midnight Hour,"—a half length of a Mr. Williams, a well-known journalist and *littérateur* of that day, whose critical and political effusions, under the *pseudonym* of "Anthony Pasquin," went far to emulate the wit and scurrility of the celebrated "Peter Pindar," and a head of a Mr. Grant. The portrait of Mr. Lewis, of which there is a fine engraving by Jones, was a very characteristic likeness of one of the most popular actors of the day, and attracted the favourable notice of the public on the walls of the Academy. Anthony Pasquin also, a somewhat sombre but vigorously-painted picture, came in for a fair share

of praise on the part of the newspaper critics; and the portrait of Mr. Grant, whatever may have been its character or style, found favour, as it will be seen, in the eyes of one whose name will long survive with honour in the records of the British school of art. These preliminary observations are not immaterial to the clear understanding of the following extracts from the letter to which I have just referred:—

To his Brother.

"London, Monday.

. . .

"Old Lawrence has not called upon me since before the exhibition; nor have I seen the son since Sir Joshua's funeral. I imagine that I am no favourite in that family, since the publication of a very severe and, indeed, illiberal criticism on the king's picture, which you may recollect to have read in the first 'Observer,' after the opening of the exhibition. The same paper mentioned my picture of 'Pasquin' as the best in the room; and, from some circumstances, I am led to think they may probably suspect it to have proceeded from some friend of mine, and with my concurrence. If they do impute it to me, I am sorry for it, and wish they would show it in such a way as would justify me in noticing it. Satisfied in my own mind, however, how very little I merit suspicion from them, I consider it with great indifference.

. . . . . .

"In my late letters I have been so accustomed to egotism, that I don't know how to discontinue the subject. But I feel myself ungrateful when I even think of withholding anything from my aunt and you that I know will give you pleasure; and therefore do I tell you that Stothard, the painter, saw Mr. Grant's picture at his house, and declared it to be equal to the best he ever saw of Reynolds or any other man. This picture was honoured with the worst place in the whole exhibition. Mr. Abbott, the painter, also told Heath, the engraver, that he considered my pictures by much the best in the exhibi-

tion. Were I to tell you all I hear in this way, even *you* would tire of the subject."

In another letter, written about the same time, we find a further indication of that progress in public favour from which permanent success might be fairly anticipated. He says:—

"Mr. Bestland called on me last week, and told me he was going about a very large work: to have a picture painted of all the members of the Academy balloting in their Council Chamber; the faces to be portraits of the present academicians, and the whole picture to be done on the same scale as Copley's 'Death of Chatham.' A large stipled print to be done from the picture, and dedicated to the King. He said he had been to all the academicians, who highly approved the plan, and finished his account of it by requesting I would undertake to paint the picture for him. This, you may suppose, astonished me not a little. However, I made no scruple of declining it, by telling him I was apprehensive I could not do justice to a work of that magnitude and importance. He would not allow this, and said he would call on me again the next morning; and the next morning I finally declined after the maturest deliberation. I shall give you more particularly my reasons in my next."

The letter in which these promised further reasons, if any, were detailed, is not extant; but there can be little doubt that in declining so flattering and apparently advantageous a proposal, he was influenced by a conscientious unwillingness to undertake a task for which he considered himself but imperfectly qualified, and in the execution of which the prospect of pecuniary advantage could not, in his estimation, counterbalance the fear of discreditable failure or merely relative success. Assuredly, his refusal was not in any degree to be attributed to the absence of that feeling of honourable

ambition which would prompt him to efforts of a higher class in the art, than were involved in the successful practice of portraiture. Although devoting himself chiefly to that branch of the profession which, in those days, alone held out the prospect of adequate remuneration, he was very desirous of essaying his powers in the higher department of history; and it appears from many passages in his correspondence during the ensuing two years, that he was applying himself in the intervals of more regular and profitable labour to the composition of a historical picture. This was, I believe, the work which he completed and exhibited at the Royal Academy in the year 1794:—"The daughter of Jephthah lamenting with her companions," a subject which afforded scope for a good deal of elevated sentiment and expression, in its treatment. Whatever may have been its merits or defects as a picture or a composition, the amount of thought and study essential to its completion cannot have failed to be highly beneficial to his general proficiency as a painter.

We have seen that while pursuing with great ardour the studies appropriate to his profession, he laboured, with equal earnestness, to carry into effect those plans of mental improvement to which he refers so emphatically in a recently quoted letter; and I may here, perhaps not inappropriately, revert to the small band of kindred spirits with whom the remembrance of his early and energetic intellectual exercises was ever fondly associated. This was a party of eight intelligent and ambitious young men, engaged in different professional avocations, who agreed to form together a private society for the discussion of questions relating to politics, morals, and philosophy.

Their plan was to meet regularly on one evening in

every week, such meetings being held at the residence of each of the members in rotation ; and after copious draughts of the cup "which cheers but not inebriates," the host of the evening was required to produce and read to the meeting an essay, written by him, on some debatable subject, of which, up to that moment, the other members of the society had no notice. Each member in his turn, and according to the order in which they happened to be seated, then rose in his place, and delivered his opinion on the matter in controversy, during such time—not exceeding a quarter of an hour—as his oratorical and reasoning powers prompted him to remain in possession of "the house." The essayist was then required to defend his own views against the objections that had been urged to them in the course of the debate ; nor was the discussion closed until each member had availed himself, if so minded, of the right of reply, by making a second speech, in which he had an opportunity of noticing and meeting, in argument, any comments that had been made on the opinions or sentiments expressed in his first address to the meeting.

It will be observed that the rules of this little fraternity, so far as they deviate from the ordinary regulations of societies formed for the purposes of debate, were well suited to develop the oratorical resources of its members, by giving a strictly unpremeditated character to the discussion, in the case of every speaker, except the essayist of the night, who, on the other hand, by the necessity of broaching the subject of debate in the form of a written thesis, was obliged to state his views according to a process more conducive to clearness of thought, closeness of reasoning, and accuracy of expression, than the preparation of even the most carefully

considered speech usually involves. The right of speaking twice, also, secured to every one who took part in the discussion, that valuable privilege of reply which, by the ordinary laws of debate, gives so great an advantage to the opener, and is so well calculated to call forth the latent powers of the orator, when excited by misrepresentation, encountered by sophistry, or stung by sarcasm.

But to return to the individuals composing this little intellectual *coterie*. The most remarkable name among them is that of the learned and indefatigable historian of the Anglo-Saxons, the late Sharon Turner, at that time, as for many years after, practising as a solicitor in London. Engaged in a career which, at first sight, seems to present peculiar obstructions in the way of that deep and continuous research so essential to the competency and success of the writer of history, he contrived to combine a close attention to his professional duties, with the cultivation of his mind in connection with many subjects of intellectual exercise, widely remote from the questions that usually engross the studious hours of the legal practitioner. At all times modest, amiable, and unpretending, if he did not exhibit in debate the brilliant audacity which shone forth in the sallies of some of the more energetic spirits among that youthful band of rhetorical *athletæ*, he never failed to secure the attention, as he commanded the esteem, of his auditory, by the philosophic calmness of his views, and the engaging candour of his tone in argument. To those who are acquainted with his literary career, it will be needless to state that if, at the outset of life, he shared the revolutionary tendencies of the period, the democratic principle obtained no firmer hold of his mind and intellect, than did the more desolating doctrines of

that *anti*-christian philosophy with which it was, in those days, so frequently associated.

The next name which, from its social and professional distinction, seems entitled to priority of notice among the members of this praiseworthy fraternity, is that of Anthony (afterwards Sir Anthony) Carlisle, the eminent surgeon and pathologist; who, for so many years, occupied the chair of anatomy in the schools of the Royal Academy,—a position in the attainment of which, his early and intimate friendship with the subject of this biography was, probably, of no small assistance to him.

At the period to which this narrative now refers, he was an enthusiastic student of the noble science to which he was about to devote himself, and a scarcely less eager disciple of the chief political and social heresies of the day. With some real and much assumed eccentricity of mind and manner, he was remarkable for originality of thought, a vast fund of general information, and an amusing quaintness of expression, which gave a zest to startling opinions, often advanced and supported in argument with more humour than sincerity. His extensive knowledge and great professional skill, combined with much that was estimable in his character, and amiable in his disposition, seemed, at that time, to hold out the fairest prospects of success in life. Nor can it be said that these anticipations were altogether fallacious; as he was destined to occupy a high rank among the scientific surgeons of his day, and achieve most of those distinctions which depended for their attainment, not on fashion or popular favour, but on the verdict of more competent judges,—his competitors in the arduous struggle of professional life. But the worldly prosperity of his career was, undoubtedly, marred, in great measure, by the unusual and injudicious

means which he adopted for the purpose of insuring its success.

Impressed with a notion that the world at large,—so indulgent to peculiarities of manner in those who, by conspicuous talent, have commanded the respect, or extorted the admiration of society,—are prone to confound bluntness of speech and arrogance of demeanour, with the genius in compliment to which they are often tolerated, and sometimes extolled, he fell into the egregious mistake of exaggerating his natural eccentricity by a too transparent affectation. Oddity of dress, studied quaintness of language, and paradoxical audacity of opinions on the most trivial as well as the most serious topics, were all brought into play, in order to impress the public with a belief in the superiority of an intellect which, from its genuine vigour, might well afford to disdain the aid of trick or artifice, in the assertion of its claims. But, with those who had no previously acquired impressions on the subject, the display of so much ostentatious, and, sometimes, offensive singularity, was often productive of annoyance rather than admiration, and tended to cast a doubt on the sterling character of that genius which sought its social triumphs at the expense of the minor proprieties of life. This was the more to be regretted, as his conversation was full of interest and instruction, whenever he felt himself at liberty to discard, for the time, his ordinary colloquial devices, which he would readily lay aside in the society of a few attached friends who knew and thoroughly appreciated the value of his mental qualities, and before whom, consequently, he could afford to appear, in his natural colours, as a man of learning, ability, and wit. It was no uncommon thing, on such occasions, to observe a total change in his tone and manner, when the un-

expected addition to the party of some stranger whom he thought it worth his while to dazzle or subjugate by his intellectual powers, caused him at once to resume that artificial demeanour and studied eccentricity of talk, the temporary absence of which had just before lent an unusual charm to his society. To sustain a *rôle* in conversation, whose attributes are, to any extent, in conflict with the spontaneous tendencies of the mind or the judgment, must be at all times a task, the irksomeness of which can hardly be compensated by its most brilliant success. But when those attributes involve a style and bearing that necessarily trench on the self-love or susceptibility of others, the quasi-theatrical performance is attended with some risk of discomfiture; as those conversational adventurers, not unknown in our day, who take upon themselves to astonish and edify society by a kind of second-hand Johnsonian arrogance, have sometimes ascertained to their cost. Of this fact, Mr. Carlisle once afforded to his friends an amusing illustration, at a dinner table, where he had been invited to meet the celebrated Dr. Spurzheim, on that gentleman's visit to London, during the first outbreak of the phrenological mania among the "blue" circles of London.

Mr. Carlisle, like the majority of his really scientific brethren, had no faith in the doctrines of the new theory: but the ordinary rules of politeness might well have restrained him from any open manifestation of contempt for the real or pretended science, in the presence of its most conspicuous votary and apostle, on an occasion when the assembled party had been summoned expressly to do him honour. Mr. Carlisle, however, thought proper to assail him from the opposite side of the table, with a jeering challenge to try his demonstrative powers on *his* (Mr. Carlisle's) head, which he

declared himself quite willing to submit to the professor's scientific manipulation; plainly intimating, at the same time, his utter incredulity as to the alleged results of the science, and his conviction that it was a delusion and an imposture. The host and the rest of the company witnessed with much annoyance this sarcastic onslaught on the "lion" of the day. But the calm and shrewd professor, after having borne with an impassive countenance the undisguised incivility of his assailant, quietly observed, addressing the lookers-on: "I will not trouble the gentleman to submit his head to the scrutiny of my fingers. I am sufficiently skilled in the science, to read his character at this distance. Any one who is even slightly acquainted with the principles of phrenology, can see by a glance at his frontal development, that the organ of *self-esteem* is *immensely large!*"

Not less conspicuous for talent, and with a sounder judgment to control and direct its impulses, was one among that little community, whom many solid gifts of nature and study seemed to mark out for distinction in a career that offers the most brilliant prizes as the reward of professional industry and perseverance. This was Thomas William Carr, at that time starting in life as a barrister of the Northern Circuit, with every prospect of brilliant and permanent success, but who, at a comparatively early period of his practice, was induced to accept the lucrative appointment of Solicitor to the Excise, and sacrifice his chances of forensic distinction, estimated by the most eminent of his professional contemporaries at a high rate of probability, for the certainty of present competency and eventual opulence. Among the members of that studious confraternity whose existence I am recording, there was

no one to whose society Mr. Shee was so warmly attached, from whose argumentative powers he derived so much gratification and benefit in the active collision of thought, or in whose example he found so much encouragement to persevere in that eager pursuit of knowledge for which they were both equally conspicuous. Whatever judicial or political honours Mr. Carr may have personally forfeited, by his abandonment of a career for the labours and triumphs of which he was eminently qualified, the elements of social and official distinction have been rather conspicuously developed in connection with the fortunes of his immediate descendants. He was the father of the late Sir William Ogle Carr, Chief Justice of Ceylon, and the father-in-law of Sir Culling Eardley, of the Right Honourable Stephen Lushington, Judge of the Admiralty Court, and of the ex-Chancellor, Lord Cranworth.

The remaining members of this little studious *coterie* were Henry Duppa, afterwards well known as a police magistrate, and a conspicuous *habitué* of the literary and scientific circles of London; Dr. Fowler, a young physician, who subsequently settled and practised his profession with much eminence and success at Norwich; Mr. Nugent, already mentioned as a brother student and an early and intimate associate of Mr. Shee,—one whose playful humour, readiness of repartee, and contagious buoyancy of spirit, were his chief claims to admission into the ranks of the society, where he often agreeably diversified and enlivened the prevailing gravity of discussion by lively jest or humorous illustration;—and,—though last not least,—Grosvenor Bedford, whom a few warmly attached friends among the survivors of that generation may still remember as an amiable, learned, and accomplished gentleman, whose society was highly esteemed and

much courted by the brightest and most cultivated intellects of his day in social and political life. Mr. Bedford was at that time a junior *employé* in one of the government offices, in which I believe he subsequently attained a high and important grade. In the path of life on which he had entered, there was probably little to excite the ambitious hopes and aspirations which stimulated the mental efforts of the majority of his colleagues in this intellectual association. But, be that as it may, he was second to none of the eight in the search after philosophic truth, and the love of moral and political disquisition; and as he bore his part ably and eloquently in their debates, and contributed his full share of wit and information to their social meetings, so the name of Grosvenor Bedford was in after life ever associated in the mind of Sir Martin, with his pleasantest reminiscences of that studious and hopeful period of his career.

The existence of this little deliberative society extends over a period of several years, during which, Mr. Shee's professional progress, though marked in each succeeding year by a sensible advance in reputation, among his brethren of the pencil, was yet very tardy in exhibiting those solid evidences of popularity, which continuous and profitable employment, as a portrait-painter, could alone supply. In most instances, the works which attracted the greatest amount of favourable notice on the walls of Somerset House, and contributed to place him in a conspicuous rank among his fellow-labourers in the field of art, were undertaken at his own risk, and executed solely with a view to the establishment of that reputation, on which he was forced to rest his hopes of more solid success at a future period.

From many passages in his correspondence, it is evident that his actual receipts from the practice of his profession, even down to the time when his merits were fully recognised by the "hanging committee," and became the theme of general admiration in the circles of taste, were barely, if in fact, sufficient to provide for his yearly expenses, notwithstanding the strict and scrupulous economy which he invariably observed. There is abundant evidence that during those years of expanding fame, but of ill-requited exertion, his circumstances could, at times, ill dispense with that pecuniary aid, which, if his pride and delicacy would not allow him to seek it, was generously and spontaneously proffered by the ever watchful affection of his aunt, Mrs. Dillon, now once more a widow. How sensitively alive he was to the mortification involved in the necessity, actual or anticipated, of trespassing on the liberality of his friends, may be collected from the fact that in order to escape that grievous necessity, or restrict it within the narrowest possible limits, he adopted a system of self-denial with regard to many of the comforts, and even what are generally considered, the necessaries, of life, to which, probably, not one man in five hundred occupying the same social position, would have voluntarily submitted.

It is an undoubted fact that for one whole winter, during the time when he occupied apartments in Craven Street, he rarely, if ever, *dined*, except when enjoying the hospitality of his friends. His daily practice was to walk, after his labours in the painting room were over, from Craven Street to St. Paul's Church-yard, and back again; this expedition occupying about the time which a man might be reasonably supposed to devote to the business of a solitary dinner,

at a tavern or eating-house, within some moderate distance of his lodgings. On his return, he of course lost no time in calling for *tea;* and it is highly probable that the inordinate consumption of bread-and-butter with which he accompanied his liberal potations of that cheering and soothing beverage, betrayed the secret of his abstemiousness, which his daily pilgrimage to St. Paul's was expressly devised to conceal, as a humiliating fact, from the notice of his landlady and her household.

Be it remembered that this severe gastronomic discipline was not, even in any qualified sense of the term, compulsory. The anxious and provident solicitude of his friends in Dublin kept too watchful an eye over the state of his finances, at that period, to allow of his experiencing such an extent of pecuniary pressure. It was the systematic proceeding of a man who, foreseeing, and perhaps exaggerating to himself, the inevitable delay of the period when he could permanently rely on his own exertions for his professional and personal expenditure, was resolved to husband, to the utmost, his present resources, by denying himself everything that was not strictly indispensable to his actual existence, the proper cultivation of his intellect and talents, and his respectable appearance in society. That he could have persevered for several months in this system of voluntary starvation,—or all but starvation,—without permanent injury to his health, is matter of some surprise. In after years, he described himself as having experienced no inconvenience, at the time, from this essentially *maigre* diet. But he was wise enough not to test to the utmost, the soundness of a theory, concerning which, he had no doubt, very serious misgivings, even during the period when he was

carrying it most strenuously into practice. It was probably on the first brightening of his prospects, by the approach of regular professional occupation, not wholly profitless in its results, that he quietly relapsed into the ordinary carnivorous habits of society, and daily *indulged* in the *superfluity* of a dinner.

To the exhibition of 1793, Mr. Shee contributed, among other pictures, a whole-length portrait of Mrs. Stephen Kemble, the popular actress, as Cowslip, in O'Keeffe's extravagant farce of the "*Agreeable Surprise;*" and, in the same year, if I mistake not, he also sent to the Royal Academy, a portrait of Miss Power, a young lady to his union with whom, a few years later, he was indebted for forty-nine years of uninterrupted conjugal happiness. In a letter addressed by him to his brother, in January 1793, I find the following passage:—

"I am painting a head of Miss Power, who is a good subject and a fashionable girl. If I like it, and she has no objection, I shall exhibit it. They are a most worthy and respected family."

It may be assumed that his works in that year's exhibition, had not, at least according to his own impression, failed to sustain the credit which he had previously obtained as a rising artist; as he now, it will be seen, for the first time, resolved to enter the lists as a candidate for the degree of Associate of the Royal Academy.

To his Brother.

"June 17th, 1793.

. . . . . .

"I yesterday received your letter. The *frenzy* of democracy that rages in its first page alarms me. The *rational, temperate* politician seems lost in the *wild,* speculative enthusiast. The

bounds of moderation are o'erleaped, and you range at large in unrestrained licentiousness of opinion. I shall not, however, trouble you much with politics, though you have set me so copious an example. I am sick of the French and their proceedings. They are unexampled ruffians, and have mortally stabbed the Goddess of Liberty. I can scarce hear or speak of them with patience, and shall therefore drop the subject.

. . . . . .

"I intend putting my name down as candidate for an associate, not from any probability of my being chosen, but that I may not be wanting to myself in any fair and honourable mode of exertion; and my withholding my name might be construed as having united with the opposite party. Beechey and Hoppner, notwithstanding all their violence against the Academy, intend doing the same. I told them of my intention. They, I am satisfied, will be the successful candidates. I am sure they ought to be so."

It will be collected from the foregoing extract that the world of Art was not free from those hostile factions which, at that period, vexed the councils and disturbed the tranquillity of so many larger and more important communities. Party spirit ran high both within and without the walls of the Royal Academy; and the institution itself was assailed by the disappointed *aspirants* to its honours, and that small section of the press which they were in a position to control or influence, with a degree of rancorous animosity scarcely surpassed, in more recent times, by the Anti-Academic League, whom it was Sir Martin's fortune, as President of a resolute and united body, to baffle and defeat with such triumphant success, even when the enemy had contrived to commence their attack, and open their fire from the floor of the House of Commons.

Amongst the light skirmishers of literature,—the *condottieri* of the periodical press,—whose powers of

scurrility were occasionally enlisted on the side of the assailants Mr. Williams, whom I have already had occasion to mention under his *nom de plume* of Anthony Pasquin, held a conspicuous position. While sitting for that portrait which, as we have seen, attracted honourable notice in the exhibition of 1792, this redoubtable critic had, doubtless, sufficient opportunity of ascertaining that the abilities of the young artist were by no means confined within the sphere of his profession, and that he was capable of wielding his pen with scarcely less effect than his pencil.

It is certain that Pasquin, and other leading members of this corps of literary *voltigeurs*, were so far impressed with a belief in Mr. Shee's talents as a writer, that they made earnest endeavours to enrol him in their critical fraternity, and sought, by every device of flattery, and every display of sympathy for the real or imaginary slights he met with on the part of the Academy, to enlist his feelings and rouse his indignation against that body, in the hope that he might prove a formidable accession to the ranks of the assailing force.

In this, however, they were doomed to disappointment. Like many of his competitors in the race of fame, whose ambition outstripped their actual progress, he had, probably, moments when the delay encountered by his hopes of academic advancement gave a bias to his feelings and a colour to his views, with regard to the proceedings and merits of the Royal Academy. No man gifted with conspicuous talents, be he ever so modest and unassuming by nature, can be wholly unconscious of their possession, or invariably insensible to their claims : and the mind least prone to depreciate the merit of others, or to over-rate its own, will, nevertheless, occasionally take a one-sided view of

the conduct of those who, called upon to decide between conflicting pretensions, cannot always do justice to one class of excellence, without incurring a plausible imputation of unfairness towards equal or perhaps superior abilities, displayed under circumstances less favourable to their immediate recognition.

But calm reflection and honest candour will, even in the mind of the unsuccessful competitor, generally induce a more dispassionate estimate of proceedings which, in the moment of irritation and disappointment, he has been disposed to censure as partial, or stigmatise as corrupt; and the passing *pique* which mortified vanity would suffer to expand into permanent malignity, will soon give place to the nobler impulse, prompting to increased and resolute exertion, as the best means of insuring future success, and avenging past neglect.

Accordingly, whatever may have been the passing feelings of annoyance, which the real or fancied injustice of the Academy or the committee of arrangement, from time to time excited in the mind of Mr. Shee, the literary antagonists of that body could never succeed in their attempt to associate him in their revolutionary labours against what they were pleased to treat as a scandalous monopoly. Nor could he be prevailed upon to co-operate with them in seeking to retard by severe, even if well-merited, criticism, the advance of those who were, like himself, endeavouring to struggle forward into notice, by the fair and laborious exercise of such talents as they possessed. When at length prevailed on to contribute some observations on the exhibition of the day, to the columns of one of the newspapers, he was, as will be seen by the following extracts from his correspondence, resolute in his

determination neither to compromise the integrity of his opinions by insincere panegyric, nor wound the feelings or interests of the least deserving among his competitors, by critical severity or unfriendly comment on what he honestly disapproved in their productions.

It appears that in the arrangement of the exhibition of 1794, his contributions met with but scanty favour at the hands of the arrangers. Of eight pictures which he had sent to Somerset House, three had indeed been excluded for want of room; but, as we find from his letters on the subject that, in this casualty, he shared the same fate as Lawrence, Beechey, Stothard, Garvey, Rigaud, and, to use his own words, "almost every other artist, whether academician or associate,"—this circumstance could not reasonably form any ground of complaint against the Academy, who had been compelled to adopt this process of elimination, with regard to some of the works of all the most prolific contributors. But it is to be collected from the tone of his letters at this period, that of such of his pictures as were retained by the committee, the majority were so placed as to excite in him a degree of displeasure, amounting almost to indignation. Among the five were the historical subject, —"Jephthah's Daughter,"—on which he had bestowed much anxious toil and study, at intervals, during the three previous years, and a portrait of the beautiful Miss Jerningham*, the daughter of Sir William Jerning-

* Afterwards the Hon. Lady Bedingfeld, sister to the late Lord Stafford, and mother of the present Sir Henry Bedingfeld, Bart. In a letter written during the progress of the picture, Mr. Shee thus speaks of his fair sitter. "I have nearly finished Miss Jerningham's picture. She sits to-morrow for the last time. 'Tis much approved of, both as a picture and a likeness; and what pleases me not a little, 'tis thought a flattering resemblance; which is more than I expected; as she is a charming girl. She has an amazing taste for drawing, and composes wonderfully for a young lady, and a young lady of fashion too."

ham; a work on which he probably built some hopes of increased reputation, and more extended notice, among the critics of the great world; as the fair subject of the picture, whom her friends considered him to have very successfully transferred to the canvas, was not only most graceful and attractive in person, but of very aristocratic connections, and moving in the highest circles of rank and fashion.

To his Brother.

"29th April, 1794.

"The exhibition opened yesterday morning, and I now sit down to give you an account of it. Before I proceed, however, I would wish you to call to mind the sensible letter of advice and expostulation you lately wrote to me. I had, indeed, some idea of copying the principal part of it, as the best means of preventing your feeling too much irritation at some unpleasant circumstances attending my appearance in it. But, not to keep you in suspense, I must tell you Miss Jerningham has a very good situation, just above the eye in the great room: the historical subject forms the centre of the right side of the *ante-room.* All the rest are as badly disposed of *as possible.* My best picture, Miranda, from the Tempest, is the highest on the left end of the great room. Mr. Rennie's half-length is the *highest* over the door of the great room, and Mrs. Larking's whole length has the *worst* situation on the left side of the ante-room: and *sic transit gloria mundi,* which, for the satisfaction of the *country gentlemen,* I thus translate, viz. 'Thus vanisheth the foolish hope of life.' But, joking apart, you will perceive, from the above arrangement, that I have not been *much favoured* by the committee this year. They have, indeed, used me most illiberally, even beyond my expectation, which, I *believe you will answer* for it, was great on the score of injustice. Though I cannot say my own feelings, individually, would leave me *completely happy* on the present occasion, yet, believe me, the most unpleasant reflection I experience is from the concern

which I know my aunt and you will feel on my account. I would wish to spare every unnecessary uneasiness, but I think it better you should know the *very worst*, which, rely upon it, you do. Deception of any kind I have ever thought an absurd and mistaken kindness. Had I been better treated, I think I should have gained some ground. As it is, all I can say is, that everybody remarks with surprise the injustice I have met with. While I was there yesterday, everyone I knew, whether artist or not, mentioned it with astonishment and reprobation. . . . . In my next, you shall have a minute and circumstantial account of the exhibition and all that it contains. I would tell you, dear George, not to suffer this little disappointment to make you uneasy, and repeat many philosophical observations on the subject; but, as you have often to me anticipated everything that I could now say, I am certain that they will occur to you without any assistance."

It appears also, from some other passages in the foregoing letter, that some of the newspapers had noticed his works with great approbation, and, in one instance, at least, animadverted on the scanty measure of justice which they had received in the arrangement of the exhibition. It was while his self-love was thus smarting under a sense of ill-treatment on the part of the Academy, which appears to have been not wholly unreasonable or captious, that he was applied to by one of the principal dispensers of newspaper fame, to exercise his critical skill and discrimination in an article on the exhibition. The following letter bears no other date than "London, Monday," but the context clearly shows it to have been written but a short time after the date of the preceding one:—

To the same.

"I send you a paper with this, in which you will find a critique on some pictures in the exhibition. I do not send it to

you because I am mentioned in it (for you will find I am not), but because I am the author of it, and I wish you to see *my first public effort in the literary line.* But you shall hear, or rather read, how I came to put on my new character of critic. . . . . Franklin, who is editor of the Morning Post, called on me some days since to request I would assist him with as many observations on the pictures in the Academy as I could conveniently give him; and [said] that I might rely upon it no one whatever should ever know the hand they came from. Here was an opening for *revenge!* Here was an opportunity to gratify envy, malice, and resentment—to stab securely in the dark, and assassinate reputation! But, believe me, to nothing of this kind did I feel the slightest propensity. I considered it as an embarrassing request, and did not well know how to comply with or refuse it. He, as you know, had been too *civil* to me easily or, indeed, civilly to be denied; and, it occurring to me that I might take this opportunity of serving a few artists I am acquainted with, as well as justly praising some works meriting every encomium and yet shamefully unnoticed,—I told him, therefore, that I would send him some critiques the next morning. I knew he wished for, and expected *severity;* and, if he did not wish to insert panegyric, I, at any rate, got out of the scrape. I sent him remarks on eight pictures, with the following note:—'*Dear Sir,—As you desired, I have, in the enclosed, remarked on some pictures which appear to me deserving your favourable notice. As I should not wish to act the severe censor of my brethren, I have selected such subjects as I could praise with sincerity, and* [*as*] *seem not to have attracted their due portion of public attention. The just application of praise must benefit and advance the art, as much as its prostitution vitiates and degrades it. I remain, &c.*' On Saturday last the five I send you appeared; and it says, *to be continued.* I have marked some mistakes made in the printing. I have been thus *particular,* thinking you would like to have the *particulars.* And I must request you will not on any account read it, or mention me as the writer to anybody, whatever. This injunction I should be sorry to think you would not attend to. . . . . You wish to have my own opinion of my pictures. Of the greater

number I cannot judge, as they are out of the way of comparison. The historical picture does not look so well as at home, because 'tis not in so good a light. It loses nothing, however, by the opportunity of comparison, and I believe has done me some credit. If I had been liberally treated this year, I should not doubt of gaining upon public notice."

To the same.

"Wednesday, 11th June, 1794.

"I am very glad to find you and my aunt have received any pleasure from the catalogue, critique, and newspaper I sent you. You have before this time received four more of the latter, *enriched* with further criticisms and observations by the *same author*, which I hope you will find better than the first. I have closed my literary labours as a critic. Franklin, who speaks strongly of the *credit* they have acquired to his paper, wished me to continue them longer; but I told him I was determined not to deal in censure, and had exhausted all my panegyric, unless I was to re-criticise those pictures he had himself remarked on, which was a thing I could not think of. Once more, I must entreat you will not show them to any body as mine. In the last, you will find I have said something of your friend Bob Porter. Not one of the persons praised knows from whence their praise proceeds."

To the same.

"June 18, 1794.

"I am glad to find you so carefully attend to my request, in not showing my remarks on the pictures to anybody. I do not wish to be considered a critic either *here* or *there*. Once known to indulge in that way, and I should much sooner be suspected as the author of any severity that might appear, than of panegyric. I should then have fathered on me everything ignorant and illiberal, and be thanked for my praise, more through fear than gratitude. . . . . I have got my pictures home safe from the Academy. I have the consolation to reflect that in this

illiberal campaign, I have been only baffled, not defeated; that if I had had the opportunity of contest, though I might not have conquered, I should not have been disgraced. I cannot help feeling the injustice done me, more even since I have got my pictures home. The treatment they received almost lowered them in my own estimation; and I was inclined to ascribe to them the imperfections of their situation. Contrary to my experience hitherto, I now think them better than when I sent them to *execution;* though, God knows, I am far from being vain of them. Nor should anything but oppression extort from me so much in their favour."

The unfavourable chances of that year's exhibition would seem to have been very keenly felt by our ambitious and sensitive young painter, and to have greatly deepened the hue of despondency which, at that time, pervaded his mind to an extent far greater than the experience of the past, or the prospects of the future, could be fairly considered to justify. Of the state of his feelings and spirits, at this period, the subjoined letter will give an accurate idea:—

To his Brother.

"London, July 29th, 1794.

"Your letter arrived in the usual course. Your metaphorical expostulation has not, I hope, been thrown away upon me, or received in any manner unworthy the intention with which it was written. I should compliment you on its figurative ability, but that I feel myself at present too serious to trifle. I fear you think I am become callous to my situation; and that accustomed as I have been to receive assistance in the moment of difficulty, I have lost all idea of exertion, and sunk into indolent insensibility to the impediments I meet with. I am sure I should not wonder if my aunt was of this opinion. But Heaven knows how much the case is otherwise with me. 'Twould give you little pleasure to know that I am

gloomy, melancholy, and desponding; that for more than twelve months past, I have not known one happy or unclouded day; that ill-success and disappointment have made me discontented and irritable to a degree of absurdity; and that I look forward to life, with a settled conviction of finding it a scene of struggling and difficulty, without hope of happiness or expectation even of ease. Were I to describe my feelings to you, these must be my topics. When I think or talk of my concerns, these are the ideas that occur. Do not suppose, therefore, because I do not speak much of the circumstances that cloud my prospects, that I feel them the less; but rather think I endeavour to touch lightly on a subject which I cannot discuss without communicating my unhappiness to no end or purpose. I fear I am one of those of whom society exhibits but too many —generally called unlucky fellows. For, certainly, neither to my own imprudence or to common casualty, can I attribute the little success I have met with. If I have not had cleverness or impudence sufficient to push myself into notice, I have not impeded my progress by improper conduct. If I have not forced opportunities of advancement, I have never lost any that offered, by neglect. If I have not made exertions out of the line of my profession, I have, within it, left nothing untried. I have neither been idle nor inattentive, dissipated nor extravagant. I have practised the most undeviating economy, and regulated my conduct, both in public and private, in a way which if it has not attracted regard, at least challenges [*]. Yet without a single act or circumstance which calumny itself can pervert to my prejudice, I find myself, after six years' unremitting attention, without a single friend with either inclination or ability to forward my interests or encourage my exertions. Do not, dear George, say anything on these subjects in return. Not that I feel hurt at your expostulation, or thankless for your advice; but that at present my own mind presents much more to my view than the delicacy of your affection would suffer you to touch on; and finding you uneasy at my folly, but increases a gloom already sufficiently dark.

* Word illegible, being obliterated by the seal; probably "respect."

According to the proverb "It is the darkest hour that just precedes the dawn";—and while the depressed and disappointed artist gave way to these gloomy and desponding reflections, on the supposed failure of a career of which it argued rather an unreasonable degree of impatience, wholly to despair, at the age of four and twenty,—when his talents had already achieved a considerable reputation, and his professional connections were evidently increasing steadily if not rapidly,—the time was not far distant when the unanimous voice of his brethren, and the verdict of public opinion, were to join in placing him in the front rank of those on whom the credit and honour of the British school mainly depended.

It is, I think, to the impression produced on the Academy and the *connoisseur* world, by the pictures which he contributed to the next year's exhibition (1795), that the permanent establishment of his reputation as a painter may be traced. And although three years elapsed after the close of that exhibition, before the Academy marked their sense of his merits, by conferring on him the grade of Associate,—an essential preliminary to the attainment of the higher distinction involved in the full-blown honours of a Royal Academician,—the delay of one out of these three years is, most probably, to be ascribed to the fact that, in the year in question (1797), he had omitted to qualify himself as a candidate, by inscribing his name on the list which is kept open during the exhibition for that purpose; the laws of the institution requiring that the associates should be chosen from the exhibitors of the year who have, in that manner, intimated their desire of being elected into the body. It must also be borne in mind that the number of associates of the Royal

Academy is (or was) limited to twenty, and that no election of persons into this class can take place, unless a vacancy has occurred in the number, either by the promotion of one of them to the higher rank of R. A., or by death or resignation among themselves.

The productions of Mr. Shee's pencil, which, in this rather eventful campaign of 1795, contributed most to his reputation were, it appears, a half-length portrait of Mr. (afterwards Sir William) Addington, Chief Magistrate of Police in London, and another of the artist's friend Mr. Carlisle. Both subjects were well calculated, though in different ways, to call forth the best energies of the painter; and by the contrast they presented in age, character, and expression, they afforded a favourable opportunity for the display of his varied powers, in all the resources of a vigorous and a refined pencil.

The worthy magistrate,—a man advanced in life, and with that portly expansion of person which, to judge by the records of contemporary portraiture, would seem to have been, at that time, more generally characteristic of elderly gentlemen than it is in our day,—was remarkable for one of those massive and gravely intelligent countenances, which admit of a broad, bold, and deep style of treatment, in drawing and colouring, while they present clear and distinct points of individual physiognomy, highly favourable to the labours of the portrait painter, in the production of a likeness. Mr. Carlisle, on the other hand, was, at the period in question, a strikingly handsome young man, whose air, figure, and cast of features, of an aristocratic character, were well suited to the picturesque costume, rather conventional in its general effect, than strictly historical in the accuracy of its details, which the artist

adopted in the delineation of his friend, under the description of a Vandyke dress.

As the functions of Chief Magistrate of Police were, in those days of political excitement and consequent social alarm, far from unimportant in their character, or insignificant in their general estimation, the holder of this responsible office was a person of very conspicuous note in London; and there were perhaps but few official faces better known to all classes of society, or more likely to attract notice in their "counterfeit presentment" on the walls of Somerset House, than that of Mr. (or as he was sometimes called Justice) Addington.

During the progress of the portrait, the *studio* of the artist was visited by many of the friends and acquaintances of the worthy magistrate, who, from the earlier sittings, all pronounced the likeness unexceptionable; and before it had passed the severe ordeal of academic scrutiny, preparatory to its appearance in the exhibition, rumour was not silent in the circles of art and taste, as to the merits of a work destined greatly to enhance the reputation of the painter.

It was during one of those sittings, that a circumstance came under the notice of Mr. Shee, connected with the details of the administration of police in those days, which, although not very important in itself, may be not inappropriately recorded here, as characteristic of a period when the "king's highway," even in what may be called the suburbs of London, was beset by dangers to the wealthy traveller, such as are unheard of, save as matter of remote tradition, in our days of increased municipal vigilance and administrative energy.

One morning, while Mr. Addington was "enthroned" in the "great chair," and Mr. Shee was busy with his

pencil, the servant entered and informed the sitter that a person, whose name he mentioned, was in the outer room, and wished to see Mr. Addington immediately, on important business. The magistrate, evidently somewhat excited by the announcement, asked leave of Mr. Shee to have the visitor ushered into the painting-room; observing, that it was one of his officers who came to him by appointment, and who had a communication to make to him, which need not interrupt the sitting. The request being of course granted, the functionary in question was at once admitted, and, anticipating the magistrate's eager inquiry, exclaimed in a tone of great exultation, and rubbing his hands, "I have done it, sir!—shot him—shot him dead!—at four o'clock this morning:"—an announcement which was received by his chief with an exclamation of delight, and every appearance of the most lively satisfaction. After this little outburst of official hilarity, Mr. Addington, turning to Mr. Shee, who had witnessed the scene with some amazement, informed him that the individual who had been so summarily disposed of by the triumphant police constable, was a certain notorious highwayman, whose depredations the magistrate had set his heart on effectually stopping, and whom he had recently taken measures to secure, dead or alive. He then proceeded to inquire from his zealous emissary the details of the highly successful operation in which he had been engaged.

It appeared that the unfortunate knight of the road had been, for several months past, infesting the localities of Wimbledon Common and Hounslow Heath, and levying abundant contributions upon sundry of his majesty's lieges, who were adventurous enough to indulge in the dangerous practice of travelling

post after nightfall. For a long time the police authorities had been on his track; but he had succeeded in eluding their vigilance. At length it was resolved to resort to stratagem for the purpose of securing him; and with the sanction of his chief, the intelligent official had, on the previous night,— accompanied by another Bow street officer of approved skill and nerve, like himself, armed to the teeth,— driven out in a post-chaise and four to the scene of the highwayman's most frequent exploits. After traversing in all directions the district which seemed most likely to attract his watchful attention, they were at length so fortunate as to fall in with him, while proceeding at a rapid pace across Wimbledon Common. Deceived by the style of the equipage, which he, no doubt, supposed to be conveying some traveller of importance, supplied with a well-filled purse, he boldly rode up to the carriage, as it approached, and called to the postilions to stop. As previously instructed, they promptly obeyed the peremptory order; and the robber presenting himself, pistol in hand, at the carriage window, encountered the muzzle of another pistol, pointed at his breast, and the next instant fell dead from his horse.

It cannot be denied that to rid society of so lawless and formidable a member of the community, was to "do the state some service;" but Sir Martin used to say that few things in his life had affected him, for the moment, with a more painful sensation of disgust, almost amounting to horror, than the triumphant recital of this deed of summary justice, from the lips of a man whose hand was so recently stained with the blood of a fellow-creature, cut off, when actually engaged in the perpetration of a crime, into which he had been, in some measure, decoyed by the exulting narrator himself.

The following extracts from letters written about this period, will afford some evidence in support of the opinion that, by his contributions to the exhibition of 1795, Mr. Shee made what is familiarly termed a *start* in public favour and estimation.

To his Brother.

"London, Thursday night, 19th [Jan. or Feb. 1795].

. . . . . .

"I have almost finished Justice Addington's picture, and find it *universally* approved. He himself likes it much, and brought Lord Grosvenor to see it yesterday. His Lordship was exceedingly polite, and seemed highly pleased with the pictures. Addington told me to-day, he said his portrait would be an *admirable* picture, and *wonderfully* like. He took notice of my having the same apartments that Lawrence had, and hoped I would meet with the same success. I said that was more than I could venture to expect, as I feared I had not equal merit, and I *knew* I had not equal patronage. (Was not that a hint?) He replied—Since I was so conspicuous in the first, he had no doubt I should [soon] experience the last; and after some further chat took his leave. Addington promised to bring Lord Belgrave to see the picture to-morrow, and thinks it probable he may have Lady Belgrave painted. But this would be quite inconsistent with my *usual good luck*. I intend sending to the Exhibition only two half-lengths and two heads. One of the half-lengths is, as you may suppose, Addington. The other is of my friend Carlisle, that I before mentioned to you. He makes a very handsome picture; and, to have it a little out of the common way, I have painted him in a Vandyke dress; and I believe 'twill be altogether the best thing I have done."

To the same.

"London, Wednesday April 1st [1795].

"I have quite finished the pictures I intend for Somerset House. The approbation they have met with has exceeded

anything I have hitherto experienced, and far surpassed my expectations. Boydell called to see them yesterday. His opinion pleased me a good deal. Addington, he said, was an admirable portrait, and many parts of that and Carlisle, particularly the hands, were *equal to Vandyke*. . . . In short, I can't tell you half he said. . . . Tresham called on me to-day, and professed himself *astonished*. He never saw more vigour of colouring, brilliancy, or force; and swore there was not one in London could paint such pictures; that he was sure, if I met with any kind of fair play, they would attract general attention. A Mr. Douglas, a clergyman and friend of Addington's, called also to-day, and said things even more flattering than what I have mentioned. In short, when I reflect on the extraordinary praise I meet with from all quarters, and the little encouragement that attends it, I am almost led to believe the world combined to *humbug* me. The pictures I intend sending this year have absolutely made *a noise* among the artists. What fate they may have in the exhibition, God knows. The hanging committee are Farington, Tyler, Bacon, and Dance. I have no acquaintance with any of them."

Besides the portraits of Mr. Addington and Mr. Carlisle, he sent to the exhibition a portrait (the head size) of himself, painted with a broad and bold pencil, which, when on the walls of the Academy, came in for its due share of commendation on the part of the critical world.

This time, at least, he had no reason to complain of his merits being overlooked by the committee of arrangement. In a letter addressed to his brother in Dublin, by one of Mr. Shee's intimate friends and associates in London, on the opening of the exhibition, the position and success of his pictures are thus noticed :—

"The hangmen of the committee have acquitted themselves most honourably towards Martin. Three of his pictures have got the best possible situations; and the fourth, though not quite so low down as the others, is seen to great advantage.

. . . I need not give you my opinion of his works, but can assure you that they have met with universal approbation, and, since yesterday morning, he has had nothing but compliments and congratulations. Even the very hangmen themselves have been reduced to the necessity of speaking of them in the highest terms. They told him yesterday, when he went for his ticket, that he had sent them some pictures which would do him honour and the Academy credit; that they and all the other Academicians were but of one opinion with regard to them, and that when he went up-stairs he would be convinced of that. They said a number of other things equally handsome, and all in the presence of a crowd of gaping exhibitors, who were present, waiting for their tickets. I must tell you that his own portrait is particularly admired; and if *Shee* was a young lady, it could not attract more notice. . . . Hoppner (who speaks well of Martin everywhere) swears that he will be made an associate next winter; indeed, he speaks of it with such confidence, and in such a way, as almost convinces me that it is a business already settled among them."

It is needless to observe that this bold conjecture as to the intentions of the Royal Academy, on the part of the writer of the above-quoted letter, was in the nature of a judgment *sans connaissance de cause.* But after making every allowance for friendly exaggeration in narrating agreeable intelligence, enough may be extracted from the foregoing passages, in the way of authentic evidence to establish the fact of a more than ordinary success, in Mr. Shee's pictorial efforts for that year, and a growing estimate of his merits among those who were, *academically* speaking, the arbiters of his professional destiny.

In a letter written by himself a few weeks later, we find (*inter alia*) some slight corroborative details on this subject.

To his Brother.

"London, Wednesday, June 24, 1794.

"I have finished *Citizen* Thelwall's head, as he was obliged to leave town in a hurry, on an excursion to the Isle of Wight. 'Tis, I think, the best head I have painted, though he is a miserably *bad subject, pictorially,* as well as politically, and quite a *cropped republican.* He seems a sensible, well-informed little man, and by no means so violent in his principles as I was taught to expect.

"My friend Bowles called on me last night to take me to the opera, by appointment. He had just dined with Harris, the manager, where there was a large party; and among the rest, Mr. Richards, secretary to the Academy, who was pleased to express himself warmly in my favour before the company. He said he had long ago considered 'Martin Shee' as one of the cleverest young men in the profession; but that my improvement within these last two years had surpassed his expectations, and surprised the whole Academy: that the King, when at the exhibition, was particularly struck with it, and spoke of it to *him* in the strongest terms."

In the autumn of 1795, Mr. Shee's brother, to whom the foregoing letters were addressed, being about to establish himself in London as a West India merchant, came over to reside permanently in England. This circumstance necessarily put an end to the correspondence from which I have given such copious extracts, and by means of which I have been enabled to trace Mr. Shee's professional career during the first few years of his residence in London, with an accuracy which may, perhaps, appear too minute. But I have thought it allowable to record many particulars of little intrinsic interest, whenever their insertion tended to complete the outline of that history of early trials, hopes, and disappointments, without some knowledge of which, no correct estimate can be formed of the mind and cha-

racter of him who, in spite of the formidable obstructions that encumber the progress of the unknown and unfriended student, has at length worked his unaided way to professional fame and social distinction.

It happens, singularly enough, that the abundant source of information supplied by these family letters, fails altogether, precisely at the moment when the most arduous period of that severe worldly probation through which all professional men, with very rare exceptions, are doomed to pass, had virtually come to an end with the subject of this biography. As far as his hopes of eminence as an artist were concerned, the season of doubt was gone by. Fortune, indeed, in her most substantial attributes, might still elude his grasp; for wealth is far from being a certain, or even an habitual attendant on the most brilliant successes in art or literature. But if the struggle were to be still severe, and the competition formidable, the contest would at least be continued on higher ground, and with the more inspiriting excitement arising from conscious power and widely recognised merit.

CHAPTER V.

1796—1801.

Mr. Shee takes a House in Golden Square.—His Marriage.—Family Details.—Professional Prospects.—Marchioness of Buckingham and Countess Macnamara.—Aristocratic and *Spiritual* Patronage.—Gratifying Incident.—Mr. Shee is chosen an Associate of the Royal Academy.—Removes to Cavendish Square.—His Election as a Royal Academician.—Progress in Public Favour.—Social Records of the Painting-Room.—H. R. H. the Duke of Clarence.—Lord Longford.—An Aristocratic *alias*.—Bishop Grégoire.—Dean Kirwan.

THERE is no doubt, that the increase of reputation for which Mr. Shee was indebted to the efforts of his pencil displayed in the exhibition of 1795, was attended, or speedily followed, by a considerable increase of professional practice. This is a legitimate inference from the fact that, in the ensuing year, he found himself in a position to take and furnish a house, and to secure for himself the blessings of domestic comfort and happiness by a judicious and suitable marriage.

In the autumn of the year 1796 he removed from his apartments in Jermyn Street, to a handsome and spacious house on the south side of Golden Square, the corner of Sherard Street, which he occupied until his removal to Cavendish Square, two years later.

On the 19th of December, 1796, Mr. Shee was married, at Paddington Church, to Mary, the eldest daughter of James Power, Esq., of Youghall, in the county of Cork. This lady, like himself, was a descendant of a very ancient Irish Catholic family,—the Powers of the

county Waterford.* She was remarkable for great personal beauty, and manners of the most winning amiability, external advantages which were greatly enhanced by the more important attractions of a cheerful and even temper, a sound judgment, a highly cultivated intellect, and a piety as enlightened and charitable as it was fervent and sincere.

Owing to circumstances connected with the early death of Miss Power's father, and the loss of a considerable property, of which his children were defrauded by the dishonesty of an agent, an event which had involved their mother in unsuccessful and ruinous litigation, the financial position of the family was not such as to invest a union so suitable in all moral and social aspects with the additional recommendation of great pecuniary benefit. Accordingly, many considerations of worldly prudence were urged against the marriage by the friends of both parties, each of them being, in the estimate of the respective connections, entitled to aspire to a much more brilliant destiny in forming a matrimonial engagement. The match, indeed, encountered serious and protracted opposition on the part of Mr. Shee's relatives in Ireland, who had formed very flattering, and probably rather exaggerated, notions of his connubial chances in England.

* Miss Power's uncle, the elder brother of her father, claimed to be the senior male representative and lineal descendant of the Lords Power, or Le Poer, whose ancient peerage was for some generations merged in the now extinct earldom of Tyrone, and whose vast territorial possessions in the county of Waterford were carried into the Beresford family, early in the last century, by the marriage of Sir Marcus Beresford with the daughter and sole heiress of the last earl of the Le Poer line; to which lady the barony of Le Poer was also confirmed by a very questionable decision of the Irish House of Lords—in those days a very unscrupulous tribunal in the adjudication of rights in contest between the wealthy Protestant owner of the estates, and the impoverished Catholic heir of the honours, of an ancient house.

This feeling might, no doubt, find much excuse in the natural partiality of those nearly connected with one who was unquestionably gifted with more than ordinary powers of pleasing in the intercourse of society, and whose sincere admiration of the virtues and graces of the fair sex, imparted, at all times, something of a chivalrous devotion to his demeanour towards them. But it was probably somewhat increased by the national tendency,—at that time rather ludicrously prevalent in the sister country,—to overrate the fascination which Irish bachelors in general were, as it was supposed, born to exercise over the too susceptible hearts of the Saxon fair, and at the same time to exaggerate the financial attractions by which these predestined victims were, in most cases, likely to be adorned. In the young Hibernian leaving his native country for the first time, with a view of seeking his fortunes in England, there were commonly to be found, in those days, two capital mental delusions, which yielded with great reluctance, to the gradual and sadly disenchanting convictions of personal experience and discomfiture:—one was an unbounded and unquestioning belief in the number and opulence of English heiresses; the other, an undoubting confidence in his own powers of subjugation, as applied to any interesting specimen of the class, whom he might think fit to distinguish by his dangerous notice and *rattlesnake* attentions.

It must not, for a moment, be imagined that the subject of this biography shared, in any degree, this preposterous belief. Probably no man was ever more thoroughly free from personal or intellectual vanity; and it may truly be said that he was, through life, far more disposed to underrate his claims to the favourable notice of society, than inclined to believe in the exist-

ence of his own popularity, even when its evidences were unmistakeable, in the judgment of the uninterested observer.

How little his views and feelings coincided with those which actuated so large a proportion of his countrymen, in their eager and sanguine search after a matrimonial road to fortune, will be shown by a few extracts from a letter written by him to his aunt Mrs. Dillon, in answer, apparently, to a rather angry remonstrance addressed to him by that lady, on the receipt of a previous communication announcing his intended marriage with Miss Power. The subjoined passages, although referring to circumstances and feelings of too ordinary a class to require, in themselves, an elaborate notice from the pen of the biographer, are strikingly illustrative of the sound sense and principle which characterised the writer; while they are not without value as recording his high and just appreciation of those qualities of mind and heart in the object of his choice, to the influence of which he was indebted for the great domestic happiness of his subsequent life.

"You say, dear aunt, you looked forward to my forming connections in the matrimonial line that would be advantageous to myself and my friends. Here again, I have been misled by the idea I had formed on the subject. As to myself, every observation I could make on my disposition and the propensities of my nature, taught me to prefer a moderate to a shining lot — taught me to consider my only chance of comfort in this world, after the welfare of my friends, was the selection of temper, virtue, and good sense as the intimate associates of my life. Could I have found these qualities combined with the goods of fortune, I should have considered it fortunate. Wherever I found them unallied to disrepute, I thought them too important in the idea of happiness I had formed, not to counterbalance every consideration of wealth, which, without them,

would be to me no blessing. As to my friends, I had too many convincing proofs of their generous and disinterested attachment, not to know they would think any worldly advantage dearly purchased, if at the expense of my peace."

In a further passage of the same letter, he thus describes his intended wife.

"A girl in whom, after an intimate acquaintance and unremitting observation of five years—after the studied application of every test which can ascertain principle, temper, and truth, I solemnly declare I should not know where, in any of these important considerations, to point out a fault. Do not, dear aunt, think this the exaggerating language of love. . . . . I am unacquainted with raptures or tumults. I have ever held in estimation far other qualities than such as are the fading objects of that impetuous passion. I admire no grace but that of goodness — I am caught by no charms but those of virtue. Miss Power's attractions for me are principles and virtues which fit her for the duties of a wife,—manners and accomplishments which recommend her as a friend,—and temper, understanding, and information to qualify her for a companion."

Whatever passing annoyance may have been experienced by Mrs. Dillon, at the disappointment of ambitious hopes suggested by her truly maternal affection, her character and feelings were too much in unison with those of her nephew, in the estimate he formed of the legitimate source of worldly felicity, to allow of any permanent opposition on her part to a step which afforded him so fair a prospect of securing that first of social blessings, a virtuous and happy home. Her reluctant acquiescence in a project to which, undoubtedly, the friends of the young couple, on both sides, had some plausible grounds for objecting, on the score of worldly prudence, soon gave place to the most cordial and affectionate solicitude for their united comfort and well-being; — a feeling manifested throughout the

remainder of a very long life, by repeated acts of the most considerate kindness, characterised, in not a few instances, by a spirit of the most generous liberality.

There was certainly everything in the circumstances of the marriage to compensate, in the eyes of Mr. Shee's friends, the absence of immediate pecuniary benefit; and, indeed, notwithstanding that formidable drawback, the alliance was ultimately productive of very considerable advantage to him in a worldly and professional point of view.

Although Miss Power was herself but scantily supplied with the goods of fortune, her connections were of the highest social and commercial respectability; and the affectionate regard entertained for her by a numerous circle of prosperous relatives and friends, contributed not a little to extend the fame of the rising artist on whom she bestowed her hand, among the highest mercantile classes of London; a section of the community not inferior to any grade of society, in that cultivated intelligence and feeling of refinement which qualify for the due appreciation of talent in literature and art; while their genuine and unaffected liberality is often prompt to exhibit the true spirit of friendly patronage, without assuming or aping the lofty airs of the patron.

Amongst this highly respectable and honourable class of men,—the *merchant princes* of London,—Mr. Shee experienced through life the steadiest and most effective professional support; while in their ranks he found the most valued and attached of those private friends, whose society enlivened and adorned his moments of leisure, whose undeviating kindness cheered him in periods of worldly trial, and whose cordial regard and admiration followed him, with

exulting sympathy, through every ascending step of his distinguished but arduous career.

The two first years of Mr. Shee's married life, viz. 1797 and 1798, though fruitful of domestic and social happiness, were peculiarly unfavourable to the general interests of that profession, on the successful exercise of which his hopes of distinction and prosperity entirely depended. The complicated phenomena of continental politics,—in themselves sufficient to justify some degree of public alarm, on the score of our national position, amid the crash of empires crumbling around us,—were greatly aggravated in their menacing aspect and conjectural results, by the convulsions that disturbed and disorganised the money-market, and the wide spread of disaffection, breaking out at length into a formidable and sanguinary rebellion, in the sister kingdom of Ireland.

The dismay that prevailed through all classes of society, by reason of the Bank of England having suspended its cash payments, and the approach of civil war, in a shape which threatened to exhibit all its most appalling terrors in such close proximity to our own hearths and homes, had the effect of paralysing to a great extent, the efforts of every branch of human exertion which mainly relies for its favourable development, on the undisturbed existence of public tranquillity, and the unimpeded application of superfluous private wealth.

The panic produced among the highest classes of society by the financial crisis of 1797, was, indeed, according to contemporary report, more general in its action, and more striking in its immediate effects, than any phasis of public or social alarm which the memory of recent times can supply. In the midst

of the London season, and in the very noontide of parliamentary activity, the gay and busy world of fashion was suddenly arrested in its brilliant and varied course of amusement, hospitality, and dissipation. Family after family, of the high aristocracy, under the influence of some ill-defined dread of disastrous consequences to themselves or their possessions, deserted their metropolitan residence, and with all the speed which heavy travelling carriages and over-worked post-horses would admit, rushed down to their country seat, there to await, in the dignified retirement of their ancestral halls, and the soothing shade of their hereditary groves, the shock of that great political and social catastrophe, — all the more terrible in contemplation from the vague and indistinct character of the fears appearing to herald its approach, — which they had made up their minds to anticipate. To dream of aught connected with art, science, or literature, at such a crisis, would have been, in their estimation, to emulate the recklessness, if not the depravity of him who "fiddled while Rome was burning;" and there was never perhaps a period, when the prospects of all men professionally engaged in merely studious and intellectual pursuits, were less encouraging in a worldly point of view.

Had Mr. Shee been of a sanguine turn of mind, or disposed to attach any importance to vague promises of future patronage, or ostentatious professions of good will, in high quarters, there were circumstances connected with his marriage that might have led him to anticipate a great accession of favourable notice among the leading authorities of the great world, as well as the gradual and substantial increase in his general practice which, as I have intimated, he expe-

rienced in due time through the active friendship of his wife's family connections; and this sudden paralysis of all "*æsthetic*" feeling and artistic sympathies in the great world of London might have appeared to him peculiarly unfortunate in reference to his own budding hopes.

Among the numerous friends and acquaintances who felt or expressed a lively interest in the welfare and happiness of Mrs. Shee, on the occasion of her marriage, there was one individual, whose high social influence in the world of fashion might have been very effectively exerted in favour of the rising artist with whose fortunes those of the fair and interesting bride were now identified. This was the Marchioness of Buckingham *, whose position, as the wife of one of the most powerful peers and most eminent statesmen of his time, was naturally conspicuous in the front rank of brilliant and dignified society. In no instance that can be adduced from the social and political records of the last half-century, shall we find the aristocracy of rank and the aristocracy of intellect so strikingly united in the same persons, as we know them, traditionally, to have coexisted, at the period in question, in that numerous, able, and mentally distinguished family connection, the memory of which will ever be historically associated with the name of Grenville. Lady Buckingham, the heiress of one branch of the ancient house of Nugent, and the daughter of a nobleman whose name finds an honoured place in the literary annals of his country, as well as in the political and social

* Mary Catherine, only daughter and sole heiress of Robert Earl Nugent in the peerage of Ireland, and wife of Richard Grenville, second Earl Temple and first Marquess of Buckingham. She was the mother of the late duke, and of the late Lord Nugent.

records of the period in which he flourished, was, like the majority of her time-honoured race, at that period, a Catholic ; and although, from the religious prejudices of the day, and the political timidity of her lord, in reference to their possible results as affecting his position as a statesman, she was constrained to observe a degree of caution, almost amounting to secrecy, in her compliance with the commonest ordinances of her religion, she was much connected by ties of friendship and familiar association, with the more conspicuous members of the Catholic body in England.

The frequent presence at Stowe of some friend avowedly professing the ancient faith, served as a convenient pretext for securing the services of an emigrant French priest, or other Catholic clergyman, in the solemnization of Mass in a private chapel at that princely seat; and although she avoided, as much as possible, the public manifestation of her adherence to the unpopular and still partially proscribed religion, the Marchioness was well known to be zealously attached to its tenets, and scrupulously exact in the performance of the duties incident to its sincere profession.

To this amiable and distinguished lady, Miss Power had been early made known by a near relative, who was the most intimate friend of the Marchioness, and one of those whose frequent visits at Stowe afforded, as I have said, a decorous and specious cloak for the "*Popish practices*" carried on under its roof for the benefit of the noble hostess herself, though ostensibly as an indulgence to the spiritual weaknesses of her friends. This lady, whose name was afterwards much associated with that of Lady Buckingham, in connection

with a long course of kind and generous attentions to the emigrant French *noblesse*, and particularly to the immediate adherents and personal followers of the Comte de Lille, — afterwards Louis the Eighteenth, — when that prince occupied Lord Buckingham's house at Hartwell, was Miss Macnamara, subsequently known as the Countess Macnamara, in virtue of the graceful compliment paid to her by the restored monarch of France, in conferring on her that titular rank, in memory of the good offices performed by her to him and his friends during their exile.

On the announcement of Miss Power's approaching marriage with Mr. Shee, Lady Buckingham spoke confidently and unreservedly of the valuable assistance she hoped to afford to the professional prospects of the young painter, by her influence with the great world of London, and dealt generally in those flattering expressions of good-will, and promises of service, which, when proceeding from the lips of the great or the powerful, constitute the groundwork of so many shadowy anticipations and delusive hopes.

Some personal experience of the value of such professions, when estimated according to the standard of reasonable probability, — even without disputing their claim to the merit of a qualified amount of sincerity, — had, as we have seen, put Mr. Shee sufficiently on his guard against a too sanguine reliance on the future result of such high-sounding promises. Fortunately, as his expectations were not raised, he was not doomed to encounter the annoyance of disappointment. But not even *his* low estimate of all such chances, or his somewhat contemptuous conviction of the futility of these demonstrations of *bienveillance*, on the part of influential personages,

could have altogether prepared him for the singular mode of accomplishment which, in process of time, the Marchioness devised for her scheme of enlightened and beneficial patronage.

About two years after the marriage, during which period that lady had given no practical evidence of her remembrance of the young couple or their prospects, it suddenly occurred to her that Mr. Shee's pencil, then rising rapidly into notice and distinction, might be usefully and gracefully employed in furtherance of a pious and charitable project of her own, in the spiritual merits of which she was amiably willing to afford him an opportunity of participating. The enormous influx of French emigrants, including a large proportion of the provincial clergy, into England, had increased the number of Catholic residents in this country to an extent far more than commensurate with the amount of "church accommodation" available for the members of that communion; and although the identity of language and ritual, observed throughout the western branch of the Catholic Church, in the celebration of the Mass, and in all the solemn services forming the orthodox routine of public worship, exempts the Roman Catholic in a foreign land from any practical inconvenience arising out of his ignorance of the language,—as regards his participation in the devotions of his co-religionists, and his full understanding of the ceremonial,—yet in the less important matter of instruction from the pulpit, the philological deficiencies of these unfortunate refugees could not fail to be severely felt, as connected with a sense of partial spiritual destitution, even where the moderate proximity of a chapel placed within their reach the more essential rites of their ancient faith.

To provide convenient and suitable places of worship for these numerous victims of an anti-religious persecution, was clearly a legitimate and laudable object with their wealthy fellow Catholics among the English; and Lady Buckingham, as might be expected, took a very prominent part in most of the proceedings intended to effect so desirable a result. She had indeed undertaken, wholly or partially at her own expense, or that of her lord,—who was generously willing to forward her benevolent design,—to erect a small chapel on some portion of his property, for the benefit of the French emigrants; and the project was, or appeared to be, in a fair way of being carried into effect. In a building devoted to so sacred a purpose, an *altar-piece* seemed a highly desirable, if not an absolutely necessary ornament of the sanctuary or chancel: and, nothing doubting that the religious sympathies of Mr. Shee would prompt him to supply that deficiency by the eager employment of his best energies as an artist, Lady Buckingham made a formal request to him that he would undertake this pious work, and *present it, as a gift*, to the altar of her projected chapel.

It will not, I should hope, be considered as arguing any deficiency of religious or benevolent feeling in Mr. Shee, that he did not think himself called upon, at the suggestion of one who had not the slightest claim on his good offices, and with whom he was not even personally acquainted, to devote many months of anxious study, thought, and toil, which he could ill spare from his regular professional labours, to the gratuitous and unremunerative task so coolly proposed to him; nor will it be matter of surprise that, in some disgust at what he deemed an impertinent mockery of patronage, he met the proposal, as communicated in a letter from

Miss Macnamara to Mrs. Shee, by an answer in which the courteous terms of his refusal were not wholly free from a perceptible tinge of sarcasm. The circumstances were certainly of a nature to suggest and justify a gentle rebuke to that excess of religious zeal, which sought to eke out the shortcomings of its own individual benevolence, by a vicarious sacrifice of time, labour, and intellect, required at the hands of another.

The late incomparable Sydney Smith, in one of those epistolary appeals to the good sense of the public, in which he was wont, from time to time, to exhibit that matchless combination of wit and wisdom for which his name has become proverbial among the present, as well as the last generation, very happily illustrates the principle of substitutional self-denial,—generously indulged in, as he alleges, by the episcopal order, at the expense of the deans and chapters, at a particular juncture of ecclesiastical affairs, — by a reference to the benevolent conduct of a well-known economical dowager, who, when seated next to him at a charity sermon, was so greatly moved by its persuasive eloquence, that *she borrowed a sovereign from him to put into the plate.* Without seeking to derogate in any way from those general merits of active beneficence which are unquestionably identified with the memory of the Marchioness of Buckingham, I cannot but think that, in this instance, her charity partook a little of that peculiar character so humorously satirised by the witty canon of St. Paul's.

The result of this well-meant attempt at religious patronage on the part of her ladyship, was not such as to increase her interest in the worldly prosperity of those who thus undervalued the opportunities of spiritual merit, so considerately held out to them; and it

need hardly be added that Mr. Shee's now rapid advance in professional fame and social distinction, received no farther assistance from the friendly notice or dignified protection of this distinguished lady.

We have seen that, as soon as he considered himself to occupy a position in the public eye of sufficient prominence to justify him in looking for academic honours, he entered his name on the list of candidates for the degree of associate of the Royal Academy; and he had annually renewed this formal announcement of his presence in the field of competition, for the two or three next succeeding years in which he was a contributor to the exhibition. It happened, however, that although he had sent some pictures to Somerset House, which figured in the annual display for the year 1797, he omitted to put down his name as a candidate during the continuance of that exhibition, and was consequently, by a strictly enforced law of the Academy, ineligible as an associate in that year.

This neglect of the indispensable form by which exhibitors are expected to mark their appreciation of the grade in question, as a stepping-stone to the higher honours of the Academy, proceeded from no insensibility to the distinction it confers. Impressed,—but, as the event proved, erroneously impressed,—with a belief that the internal intrigues which, at that period, to a certain extent, disturbed the wholesome action of the academic body politic, were brought to bear on the result of the elections, in such a manner as to diminish the chances of success to those candidates who relied solely on the weight of their professional merits, and were unsustained by personal or party influence among the electoral body, Mr. Shee had determined for the present to decline the risk of a contest under circum-

stances involving, as he thought, the certainty of defeat. To the academic exhibition of 1798 he contributed, among other works, a whole length portrait of a cavalry officer, in a foreign uniform, with his horse. The individual represented was a gentleman of the name of O'Shea, a countryman of the artist's, as his name sufficiently indicates, and resident in Ireland, whither, if I mistake not, the picture was sent shortly after its return from the exhibition. Of the character of the composition, or its mode of treatment, I am unable to give any account; and my sole reason for noticing it in this place is supplied by the fact that Sir Martin himself used to advert to the impression produced on the Academy by the picture in question, as the proximate cause of his election as an associate; while in like manner he ascribed his subsequent attainment of the diploma of R.A. to the merits of another large *equestrian* picture—the portrait of Colonel Vickars, of the Life Guards, with his noble brown charger and black servant—exhibited by him the year previous to that in which he was elected an academician. "In both instances," he laughingly remarked, "I *rode* into the Academy."

But whatever share the first-mentioned production may have had in disposing the judgment of the academic tribunal in his favour, an incident occurred during the period of that exhibition of 1798, which left him no room for doubt, as to the reality or strength of the impression produced by his works on these formidable arbiters of his professional destiny.

While engaged one morning in his painting room, he was greatly surprised by the joint visit of three of the most influential members of the Royal Academy, with no one of whom had he more than a slight and ceremo-

nious acquaintance, and the object of whose combined invasion of his *studio* he was therefore quite unable to conjecture. The principal spokesman and apparent leader of the party was Mr. Farington, whose name, though now hardly remembered in connection with the practice of the art, for distinguished merit in which he must be supposed to have been indebted for his rank as an R.A., was, at that time, intimately associated with every internal or legislative proceeding of the body, over whose movements, for good or evil, he exercised so powerful a control, as to procure for him the appellation of "Dictator of the Royal Academy."

There was probably much exaggeration in this view of his position; but it is unquestionable that by his great personal influence over many of his brother academicians,—an influence resulting from unintermitting attention to academic matters, aided by great diplomatic tact, and many other effective elements of social popularity,—he possessed a degree of weight in the deliberative councils of the body, far beyond what any other member could hope to exert or obtain.

Of the two academicians who accompanied him, one, at least, though less influential in academic affairs, was greatly his superior in professional reputation, and has left a name which will ever be recorded with honour and distinction in the history of the British School of Painting;—a name which, in another department of the fine arts, has been perpetuated with equal, if not greater *éclat*, in the person of his son. This was Robert Smirke, whose graceful and original pencil, in illustrating the quaint and brilliant scenes of oriental romance, and the no less captivating fictions of the immortal Le Sage, has successfully rivalled the fancy so abundantly displayed in the one, and the satirical wit that

sparkles in every page of the other. There was at that time no member of the Academy, whose genius conferred greater honour on the institution,—who enjoyed a greater measure of personal respect among his fellows, or was more conspicuous for those moral, intellectual, and social qualities which conciliate the esteem and admiration of mankind. If less effective to direct or control the movements of the Academy, the influence he possessed was more legitimate in character and wholesome in operation, than the formidable power wielded by the accomplished and restless Farington.

The third name in this *triumvirate* I am unable to recal, in my otherwise distinct recollection of the circumstances, as I have heard them related by Sir Martin himself; but it was undoubtedly that of a prominent and influential member of the body.

The object of their visit soon became apparent. After some complimentary expressions, in reference to Mr. Shee's works on the walls of the Academy, and in his *studio*, they proceeded to state that they had seen with surprise and regret that he had not, in the preceding year, taken the necessary steps to qualify himself as a candidate for the rank of associate; that they, in common with many others of the academic body, had felt some apprehension lest that omission should have been occasioned by an unfounded distrust, on his part, of the sentiments entertained towards him by the Academy, and an impression that the majority of the academicians were unfriendly to his pretensions, and unwilling to recognise his fair claim to academic distinction. They assured him that, if such a feeling existed in his mind, it was wholly founded on mistake, and embodied a most erroneous view of the wishes and intentions of the Academy in his regard; and they concluded by

expressing an earnest hope that he would inscribe his name on the forthcoming list of candidates for the rank of associate, to be supplied by the exhibitors of that year; as there was every reason to believe that such a step would be productive of satisfactory results.

It will be readily believed that these observations were listened to by Mr. Shee with great complacency; and it may be added that his surprise was even greater than his satisfaction, at finding himself the object of so flattering a *démarche* on the part of those who might fairly be considered as representing the feelings of the academic body at large. I need hardly say that he replied in suitable terms to this gratifying communication, expressed his sense of the compliment paid to him by his distinguished visitors, and assured them of his intention to profit by their friendly advice.

The result proved that this unusual proceeding on their part was not suggested by any mistaken view of the electoral chances of the year. On the 3rd of November, 1798, Mr. Shee was duly elected an Associate of the Royal Academy.

In the month of January, 1799, Mr. Shee removed from Golden Square, where he had resided since his marriage, to a larger and more convenient house in Cavendish Square, which had been for many years the residence of the eminent portrait-painter George Romney, the rival in public favour of Sir Joshua Reynolds, during a considerable portion of that great artist's career. Mr. Romney, now far advanced in years, and in possession of an ample fortune, acquired by the assiduous exercise of his profession, was about to withdraw from active life, with the view of passing his remaining years in the retirement of the country, and was therefore desirous of disposing of his town residence.

The situation of the house was so eligible, and the extended accommodation it afforded, in an *extra* suite of spacious and well-lighted rooms, built expressly for the reception and display of pictures, was so favourable to the purposes and requirements of a portrait painter in rising practice, that Mr. Shee considered himself fortunate in being able to secure its possession for the remainder of the term, of which there was then about nineteen years to run, held by Mr. Romney under the Duke of Portland. This house is associated with the remembrance of all that was prosperous and brilliant in Sir Martin's subsequent career, and all that was brightest and happiest in the records of his domestic life. It was his constant residence during a period of more than forty-five years, and remained in his possession until his death, upwards of half a century from the date of its first occupation by Mrs. Shee and himself.

Once admitted to the preliminary grade of Associate of the Royal Academy, Mr. Shee was not destined to experience any tedious delay in the attainment of the higher honours of the institution. In the course of the year 1799, two vacancies occurred in the ranks of the Royal Academicians,—one of which was produced by the expulsion of Mr. Barry, under circumstances the discussion of which would be foreign to the subject and purpose of these pages; but I may perhaps be permitted, in justice to the memory of an eminent, though wrong-headed man, to observe, that this signal act of academical rigour was provoked, not by any act of moral delinquency on his part, but by an indecorous display of party feeling and personal rancour, in the discharge of his public duties as Professor of Painting in the Royal Academy.

On the 10th of February, 1800, Mr. Shee was elected

a Royal Academician in the place of Mr. Barry, whose vacancy, being the earliest of the two which had occurred, was the first to be supplied by the process of the ballot. One other member of the class of associates was on the same evening elected a Royal Academician, in the room of a deceased member of that grade. This successful candidate was John Flaxman.

It may here be noticed that no election of a Royal Academician is effective, until sanctioned and confirmed by the sovereign; nor can any individual so elected enter on the discharge of the duties, or the enjoyment of the privileges, connected with the office, until he has received the diploma, bearing the royal sign manual, which formally signifies his appointment to the rank and degree in question. This document is not, in point of form, merely a confirmation or approval by the sovereign, of the act of the Academy, in electing the person so promoted, but a royal nomination and appointment,—purporting to emanate spontaneously from the royal grace and favour,—in consideration of his distinguished merits, and without any reference to the elective functions of the Royal Academy. It is the duty of the President to submit the result of the election to the Queen, and if it should be honoured by Her Majesty's approval, to present the diploma for the royal signature ; for which purpose, as well as for the completion of all other academic acts, and the arrangement of all other academic matters (and they are numerous) which require the sanction of the sovereign,—the President enjoys the rare privilege of personal access to Her Majesty, in his official capacity.

It was, I believe, in the year 1798, that Mr. Shee's pencil was first employed in the representation of an illustrious personage with whom, at a later period of

his career, it was his good fortune to be brought officially, as well as professionally into contact, under greatly altered circumstances, as regards the position of both,—and to whose gracious and condescending kindness he was indebted for much that cheered and brightened the happiest years of his official life. The Chamber of Commerce of Liverpool having determined to place in their spacious hall a whole-length portrait of the Duke of Clarence, as a mark of respect and gratitude to His Royal Highness,—on the occasion of some parliamentary contest in which the commercial interests of that great city had been, as it was thought, effectually served by His Royal Highness's advocacy in the House of Lords,—Mr. Shee was selected for the gratifying task of executing this important work. In the professional intercourse incident to its performance, he found, in that illustrious prince, the same unaffected condescension of manner, considerate kindness, and manly frankness of demeanour which, in later years, so justly endeared him, as King William IV., to all whom official duty or high social position necessarily placed in personal communication with His Majesty. The ready good nature with which His Royal Highness submitted to the irksomeness of repeated and long sittings, and the easy flow of animated conversation, of which he set the example and encouraged the reciprocal indulgence on the part of the artist,—to whose agreeable social qualities and high intellectual claims he ever did ample justice,—contributed greatly to lighten and facilitate a task, which, difficult in all cases, is liable to be rendered more than usually laborious, by a too rigid enforcement of those restraints of *étiquette* which the presence of royalty is naturally calculated to impose.

The picture in question is undoubtedly a very favourable specimen of Sir Martin's talent, as to colouring, effect, composition, and general arrangement. The Duke is represented in his robes as a Peer of Parliament, worn over His Royal Highness's naval uniform as admiral of the fleet,—and decorated with the collar of the Order of the Garter. He is in the attitude of one who is addressing a public assembly: an idea perhaps not easily conveyed by a single figure in a portrait, without some exaggeration of character or position, but, in this case, as it appears to me, simply and yet energetically expressed. The rather cumbrous drapery of the ducal parliamentary robe is managed with taste and skill, painted with vigour, and disposed in massive but graceful folds,—being slightly drawn up by the hand towards the left side, as the wearer, in the excitement of his own oratory, is, apparently, making a slight movement in a forward direction. The back-ground, though of that strictly conventional character, in which all the probabilities of domestic or even official architecture are boldly sacrificed to the forcible and pleasing effect of the single figure, in subordinate connection with which it is introduced, seems at least pictorially appropriate to the dignity of the subject; and if to the inquiring and practical mind of an *utilitarian* it naturally recals the interrogatory formerly addressed by a wit of this century to the screen of Carlton House, "*Care colonne! che fate quà?*"* it does in this respect but follow the most venerable precedents of the *genre*, which the records of portraiture in this country supply, from the days of Van Dyck downwards.

* Qu. "*Care colonne! che fate quà?*"
Ans. "*Non lo sappiamo in verità.*"

There is an admirable and well-known engraving from this picture, by the late Charles Turner. The portrait is still, I believe, one of the chief ornaments of the Hall of the Chamber of Commerce at Liverpool.

The advance made by Mr. Shee, as an artist, in the favour of the great world, contemporaneously with his progress in the estimation of the more experienced critics of his own profession, is significantly marked by the increase of aristocratic names which appear, about this time, in the professional records of his *studio*, in the list of those on whose "counterfeit presentment" his pencil was employed. In the year 1801, we find him engaged on portraits of (*inter alios*) the Duke of Leinster, the Marquis of Exeter, Earl Spencer, the Earl of Longford, Viscount Althorp, and the Honourable Arthur Cole. In connection with one of these portraits, that of Lord Longford, Sir Martin used to relate an anecdote curiously illustrative of the taste for *mystification*, which that noble lord would seem to have possessed in common with so many of his countrymen of the Sister Isle.

For some reason, not easily pervious to conjecture, his lordship thought proper to introduce himself to Mr. Shee under an assumed name, veiling the splendours of his Hibernian coronet,—to which the recently passed Act of Union had but just imparted that character of sterling dignity which rescued it from all chances of heraldic cavil in England,—beneath the modest designation of "Captain Coomber." Under this name he applied to Mr. Shee to paint his portrait; and the latter, to whom the *exterior* of his proposed subject was unknown, and who, of course, had no grounds to question or suspect the correctness of his

professed patronymic, or the authenticity of his assumed military or naval *status*, appointed a time for a first sitting. The picture was commenced, and proceeded towards completion, in the ordinary course of professional practice in such matters. The "captain" gave long and repeated sittings, to the mutual satisfaction of painter and subject. No friend or relative called to judge of the progress, or give an opinion as to the accuracy, of the likeness. But the sitter was evidently much pleased with it himself. On the other hand, the artist was on the best of terms with his sitter. That he was an Irishman was evident; that he was, as is not indeed rare, a chatty and agreeable Irishman, was equally manifest; that he was,—what is certainly less common,—a *solvent* Irishman, was also sufficiently demonstrated for all practical purposes, by his prompt compliance with the notice, which, in accordance with the professional rule, was displayed in black and white in a conspicuous part of the *studio*, to the effect that "*half-price*" was to be paid on the first or second sitting. Beyond this, Mr. Shee knew nothing of his agreeable but rather eccentric subject.

It happened, however, that when the face of the portrait had been completed, and the sittings in consequence discontinued, it was, with several other unfinished pictures, lying against the wall in the painting-room, one day when the late Duke of Leinster came, by appointment, to give Mr. Shee a sitting for the whole length portrait of his grace now, I believe, at Carton. The duke was accompanied by two of his daughters; and while he occupied the "throne," and Mr. Shee was busy with his palette and pencils, one of the young ladies, who had been casting a rapid glance over the unfinished works around her,

exclaimed, "Oh! papa, there is Lord Longford." The attention of the whole party being thus directed to the picture in question, a simultaneous exclamation of wonder at the accuracy of the likeness ensued. In vain did Mr. Shee protest that they were mistaken, and assure them that the individual represented, rejoiced in no higher or more distinguished patronymic than "Coomber," and boasted no rank but that of captain. They were confident of his identity with their friend; but the painter being equally confident in his assertion, and evidently sincere in his belief, as to the name and position of the individual in dispute, there was nothing for it but to treat the matter as a curious instance of accidental resemblance between two persons wholly unconnected with each other by relationship—a conclusion at which Mr. Shee had at once arrived, without any misgivings as to the veracity of the statement made to him by Captain Coomber.

A few days later, while the Duke of Leinster was again occupying the great chair in the *studio*, Captain Coomber was announced to Mr. Shee, as waiting to see him in the outer gallery, where, with an apology for leaving his sitter during a few minutes, Mr. Shee joined him. The Captain was informed that, as there was a sitter in the painting-room, he could not at the moment be introduced into that apartment. He stated, however, that his object in calling, was merely to know whether any of his friends had been to see his portrait. Mr. Shee answered in the negative.

"Had nobody seen it?" "Yes, of course different people who had been, from time to time, in the painting-room, might have seen it." "Had any particular observation been made upon it?" "Nothing that Mr. Shee could call to mind — except that, indeed, he just

recollected that a few days previously, the portrait had been mistaken for that of some Irish peer, whose name, though one tolerably familiar to him, he forgot at the moment." "Indeed," quoth the captain, "well, that's rather good. Come—I'm glad that I look like a lord, at any rate. You can't remember who it was?" "No. I should recognise the name if I heard it again." "Was it Lord *So-and-so?*" (naming some peer.) "No." "Lord *So-and-so?*" (again naming a noble lord.) "No," "Humph! was it Lord Longford?" "That's the very name!" "Ha! indeed? Odd enough. So I'm so very like Lord Longford,—am I? Well, Mr. Shee, I'll tell you something more singular still—I *am* Lord Longford." Mr. Shee bowed in silence to this announcement, not exactly knowing to which of his eccentric friend's *alias-es* he should give credit. "You have a sitter with you in your painting-room, I think," continued his jocose visitor. "Yes, the Duke of Leinster is with me." "Leinster! oh! I know him well,—he is a great friend of mine—he won't object to my coming in, I dare say." And Mr. Shee, well pleased with the prospect of having his doubts set at rest by an appeal to his grace's testimony, forthwith ushered "the captain" into the *studio*, where he was greeted by a burst of laughter from the duke and the young ladies, and assailed, as well he might be, by a host of questions as to the motive of his capricious assumption of the *incognito*.

Among many remarkable persons who, in this and the following year, passed in review before him in the painting-room, there were two individuals of great, though widely dissimilar mark in the annals of the ecclesiastical world, whose names will perhaps justify a passing notice in connection with the details of Sir

Martin's professional career;—and the more so, because, in each instance, the social intercourse which the protracted interviews of the *studio* necessitate between the painter and his *subject*, during the elaboration of a successful likeness, had,—as indeed frequently happened in the case of Sir Martin and his most distinguished sitters,—led to a degree of cordial intimacy between them, founded on reciprocal feelings of personal regard, and a mutual appreciation of high intellectual powers. One of these *celebrities* was the Abbé Grégoire, so well known in the early and less sanguinary period of the first French Revolution, not only as a distinguished orator of the Constituent Assembly, but as one of the members of the French clergy who accepted and assumed the episcopal function, under the newly devised and (as it is alleged) schismatical arrangements involved in the "*Constitution Civile du Clergé.*" The other was the Very Reverend Walter Blake Kirwan, D.D., Dean of Killala in Ireland, a convert, or *pervert*, from the Roman Catholic Church, in which he was an ordained priest, and throughout his ecclesiastical career, whether as Catholic or Protestant, the most eloquent and persuasive preacher that ever advocated the sacred cause of charity from the pulpit.

Unlike his revolutionary colleague, the Bishop of Autun, better known as Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord,—whose brilliant subsequent career, as the most acute and the wittiest, if not the wisest, statesman of his day, has historically merged his character of an unworthy priest in the somewhat less odious reputation of an unscrupulous layman,—Bishop Grégoire was a man of irreproachable morals and firm religious faith; sincere in his political views, which were theoretically republican, and not less earnest in his attachment to that

church, towards which, even if technically guilty of schism, during a short period of pardonable delusion, he was never, I believe, knowingly or deliberately in an attitude of rebellion. At the period when he gave occupation to Mr. Shee's pencil, he had been for some time resident in England, on whose friendly shores he had taken refuge from the perils which threatened him in common with every individual of his order, through the too successful development of those principles, of which, like so many other well-meaning and patriotic individuals among his countrymen, he had but imperfectly understood the tendency, and wholly failed to anticipate the result.

The early part of this century was, in England, a period of constant political excitement, the outward and popular demonstrations of which were habitually of a much more boisterous character, than our improved police regulations would at present be likely to tolerate. Riotous assemblages, brought together on some very slight political pretext, were frequently occurring to enliven the dulness of the ordinary metropolitan traffic, in the streets and thoroughfares of our great city. To be *mobbed*, as it was styled in those days, during a contested election, was no very uncommon event in the life of the most phlegmatic politician, and such as might happen, at a moment's notice, to any one whom the "great unwashed" thought proper to suspect, with or without cause, of what was then equivalent to the French republican offence of "*incivisme*," — viz., a partiality for the unpopular candidate of the hour. The subject of this biography, while walking peaceably down Piccadilly, on one occasion, with Mrs. Shee on his arm, was obliged to seek refuge for her and himself in a shop,—assailed by

the hissings and hootings of the populace, whose indignation had been roused by the colour of the ribbons in Mrs. Shee's bonnet, which, quite unconsciously on her part, happened to be of the hue chosen by that "pestilent tory," Mr. Mainwaring, when contesting the representation of Middlesex with that "uncompromising patriot" Sir Francis Burdett.

I know not whether, at the precise period to which Bishop Grégoire's sittings in Mr. Shee's painting-room are to be referred, the humours of a contested metropolitan or county election were in full play; but a little noisy turbulence among the people, and an alarming disposition to congregate in large masses, were phenomena of daily occurrence, attributable to some temporary cause of political discontent; and when, on his way to Cavendish Square, the right reverend republican, as sometimes happened, encountered, or observed afar off, what appeared to him as the threatenings of an approaching tumult, he would arrive in a state of open-mouthed amazement, not unmingled with terror, and expatiate to Mr. Shee in eloquent and energetic terms, on the singular character of the English people. "*Vous êtes vraiment, monsieur, une nation incompréhensible—vous autres Anglais!*" would he say. "Hardly a day passes that I do not witness scenes of tumult or rioting that, in Paris, would be the certain forerunners of a formidable *émeute—que sais-je? d'une révolution, peut-être! Et cependant, chez vous, tout celà n'aboutit à rien.* Government goes on as usual —business is not interrupted; nobody is even alarmed! *C'est inconcevable! Je m'y perds!*" Meantime Mr. Shee would laughingly assure him that the little ebullitions of popular feeling which had excited his wonder, were among the normal conditions of a constitutional

system,—the mere effervescence of a healthy national spirit.

Shortly after the completion of the portrait, Monseigneur Grégoire availed himself of the permission extended to certain classes of the *émigrés*, to return to Paris, where Mr. Shee renewed his acquaintance with him in the autumn of the year 1802,—a period included in the duration of that hollow truce generally known as the Peace of Amiens.

The career of Dean Kirwan, though less remarkable in a political point of view than that of his brother churchman, the famous revolutionary prelate, is nevertheless worthy of notice, as presenting some traits of feeling and character not often observed in those prudent ecclesiastics who, in Ireland or in this country, have, from time to time, deserted the rugged, thorny, and laborious track of the ancient faith, for the less irksome and more flowery paths of state orthodoxy. His great, and indeed unrivalled reputation, as a pulpit orator in Ireland, would, in itself, go far to excuse the digression of a few sentences devoted to his memory. Born of an ancient Roman Catholic family, and educated for the priesthood, he had early distinguished himself in the Dublin pulpits of his own communion, by that fervid and impassioned eloquence which is not unfrequently found among the natives of the Sister Isle, and which generally tells with so much effect on the sympathetic hearts and nerves of his excitable countrymen. Gifted with great general abilities, judiciously cultivated by education, and, doubtless, further developed by spontaneous study, he was not long in acquiring a considerable share of social as well as professional celebrity, even among those most hostile to that church whose doctrines it was his duty

to inculcate, and of whose ministry he was looked upon as a distinguished ornament. Crowds of listeners, of various religious persuasions, flocked to hear him in the pulpit; and increasing respect and popularity attended him in his personal and private character.

In this state of things, however, while attached, if I mistake not, to one of the metropolitan Catholic chapels, as a regularly officiating priest, he had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of his ecclesiastical superiors, by some slight dereliction of duty, or act of insubordination, which brought him technically, and, I presume, canonically, under episcopal censure. Whatever may have been his offence,—which his friends and admirers asserted to have been of a character involving no moral delinquency,—he was visited with a punishment which to a spirit active, energetic, and ambitious like his, was fraught with deep mortification, and calculated to produce not merely discontent, but despondency. He was removed from the exercise of ecclesiastical functions in Dublin, and sent, as curate, to take charge of the spiritual concerns of a poor and obscure parish in a provincial district. There, far away from the scene of his oratorical triumphs,—with a congregation wholly incompetent to appreciate his talents, and a neighbourhood which offered no social or intellectual resources to beguile the *tædium* of what he felt to be his banishment,—he had time and opportunity for ample worldly, as well as spiritual reflection. What may have been the process of reasoning, or the character of deliberation which occupied his mind, and eventually decided his conduct, under these adverse circumstances, must ever be matter of conjecture. The result is known. Not very long after his ecclesiastical *rustication*, he startled the religious world in Ireland by a step, the announce-

ment of which filled the soul of the Protestant theologian with exultation, while it struck terror and dismay to the heart of the Catholic controversialist. Great was the spiritual rejoicing through the ranks of the "ascendancy," when the public organs of the party proclaimed the cheering fact that the Rev. Walter Blake Kirwan, so well known for his eloquence in the pulpit, had—to use the nationally characteristic language of a Dublin newspaper on this, or some similar occasion—"renounced the errors of the Church of Rome, and *embraced those of the Church of England.*"

It was not to be expected that a convert of such importance should be left to pine long in obscurity, for want of that preferment, for which the mere act of abjuration at once supplies a legal qualification. The holy orders of the Roman Catholic Church being fully recognised as valid by the Church of England, any priest of the former communion who conforms to the latter, becomes, *ipso facto*, a clergyman in full orders of the establishment; and therefore no delay, arising from canonical obstacles, having reference to this point, can occur in carrying into effect any arrangement for the benefit of the sacerdotal neophyte, whose advancement is contemplated. In due time, the deanery of Killala was conferred on Dr. Kirwan; and if he did not, like another clerical deserter from the old faith, Bishop O'Beirne, attain the honours of the episcopal order in his new communion, it is probably to be accounted for by the unusual course he adopted with regard to the church he had left. It is certain that he himself attributed the disappointment of his cherished hopes, in this particular, to causes easily understood in reference to a peculiarity of his professional career, as

an Anglican clergyman, which the following details will tend to illustrate.

Shortly after his formal act of abjuration, it was publicly announced that he would, on a given day, preach his first sermon from a Protestant pulpit, in one of the principal parish churches of Dublin. This notification produced much excitement and curiosity among the rival sections of the religious world; and on the appointed Sunday, the church in question was crowded to overflowing, by a congregation composed in great part of his former co-religionists, whose indignation at what they considered his deplorable apostasy, was not strong enough to overcome their intense anxiety to hear what so learned and eloquent a deserter from their ranks, could allege as a legitimate ground for his defection; while, on the other hand, the Protestants flocked around him on the occasion in great numbers, in joyful anticipation of a brilliant argumentative, as well as oratorical, triumph, on the part of their new champion.

Both parties were doomed to disappointment. The preacher delivered a beautiful, eloquent, and impressive discourse on some text illustrative of the practical duties of Christianity. Not one word of controversy fell from his lips; nor did he make the remotest allusion to the motives of his recent change. Unexceptionable in point of Christian morality, and replete with spiritual *unction* as were the sentiments to which he gave utterance, their expression was unaccompanied by a single phrase from which his auditory could infer the existence, in his mind, of those powerful and newly-awakened convictions which all present had expected to hear him proclaim, develop, and defend.

His old friends, of course, drew their own inferences from this unexpected *reticence;* while his new allies were probably but little pleased with a display of Christian forbearance, more symptomatic of overflowing charity, than of superabundant faith. It was, however, they thought, but a triumph deferred. Doubtless he was carefully elaborating, in the retirement of his closet, those overwhelming arguments against his former creed, which, on some future and not distant occasion, he would bring to bear, point blank, on the very citadel of "Popery." But that formidable and anxiously expected assault never took place. During the whole of his subsequent career as a preacher, he studiously refrained, not only from all discussion of the main dogmatic questions at issue between the two churches, but even from those conventional phrases of smart vituperation and lofty contempt, in which Protestant orthodoxy, as understood in the precincts of Exeter Hall, has, time out of mind, indulged so freely when alluding to the creed and professors of the Roman Catholic religion.

It is true that the peculiar nature of his vocation, as a preacher, afforded him greater facilities for avoiding the ordinary *amenities* of controversial oratory, than would, in the common course of events, have fallen to the lot of a pulpit orator, recruited from the hostile camp, whose *spécialité*, as such, had been of a less restricted character. His distinctive gift was that of appealing to the benevolent and generous feelings of his congregation, with a persuasive power, and a practical effect, of which, to judge by the report of his contemporaries, there had never been an example in their day, and to which it would be difficult to find a parallel in our own. Such was the resistless magic of his heart-

stirring eloquence, when exerted in the cause of the poor or the orphan, or on behalf of any object of public benevolence which appealed strongly to the feelings of a Christian auditory, that, on more than one occasion,—if the same contemporaneous authority can be relied on,—individuals among his congregation have been known, not only to empty their purses during the collection, which, according to Dublin practice, went the round of the church or chapel, after the sermon, but where their supply of coin was scanty, to take the watches from their fobs, or the gold or jewelled buckles from their shoes and knee-breeches, and cast them without hesitation into the plate, in order to eke out the deficiency of their pecuniary contribution.

If, as we have seen, this eminent ecclesiastic carried into the communion of his new spiritual allies, but little of that rancorous and uncharitable hostility to his former faith and its professors, which so generally characterises the religious convert, in every creed, his defection from the ancient Church was far from being viewed by the great mass of the Catholics, in a spirit of corresponding forbearance and placidity; especially among the lower classes of Dublin, with whom, in the days of his Catholic orthodoxy, he had enjoyed unbounded popularity. The strong feeling of indignation produced among them by what they considered his apostasy, was manifested on some occasions in a perfectly unmistakeable manner, and, as became the national character, with circumstances bordering on the ludicrous; as, in the following instance, related by himself to Mr. Shee.

He was, one day, while in the zenith of his fame as a Protestant preacher, walking in one of the streets of Dublin, when an old apple-woman, with

a basket on her head, who was advancing towards him in the opposite direction, suddenly stopped right in front of him, and staring at him full in the face, while she stood with arms *akimbo* before him, so as to obstruct his direct progress, exclaimed, with a strong *brogue*, and in a tone of much compassion: "Och! thin, it's a great pity!" "What is a pity, my good woman?" asked the dean, rather amused at the exclamation. "Sure it 's a mighty great pity, jew 'l!" reiterated the mysterious *fruitière*. "What do you mean?" again inquired Dr. Kirwan, "what is a pity, I say?"

The woman looked at him steadfastly for a few seconds, and then slowly replied: "That you 'll be d——d! and *you know you 'll be d——d!*" and so saying, she stepped aside and passed on.

CHAPTER VI.

1801—1802.

Letter to Noel Desenfans, Esq. — Treaty of Amiens. — Visit to Paris. — Samuel Rogers. — Correspondence and Journal. — The Louvre. — The Comte de Lasteyrie. — M. Mérimée. — Bonaparte, First Consul. — Grand Distribution of Prizes for Productions of Industry. — Mr. Shee is present at the Ceremony with the Committee of the National Institute. — His Impression of Napoleon. — French Artists. — David. — Guérin. — The Theatre. — Talma as Orosmane. — Lord Erskine. — John Philpot Curran. Hair-dressing and Philosophy.

THE year 1801 is deserving of especial notice in the biography of Sir Martin, as that in which he first came forward in the character of an author; although his first literary flight was not of a very lofty description, dealing as it did with a subject of a temporary and professional nature, the interest of which has long since wholly evaporated.

There was at that time adorning the circles of taste, and infesting the regions of criticism in London, a certain Mr. Noel Desenfans, a gentleman who, it appears, had been in former days a teacher of the French language, but who, at the period to which this narrative now refers, assumed the designation of "late Consul-General of Poland, in England;" an office which he was supposed to have held, nominally at least, in the latter years of the unfortunate Stanislaus Augustus, and to have resigned, or been deprived of, when the phantom sceptre passed altogether from the equally shadowy

grasp of that unhappy specimen of elective royalty. But whatever may have been the degree of authenticity attached to Mr. Desenfans' diplomatic or official pretensions, there is no doubt that he was a picture-dealer of indisputable quackery, and that, in that capacity, he enjoyed a certain amount of influence over that class of the public to whom

"Some demon whispers: 'Strephon, have a taste!'"

without supplying them with knowledge or principles to direct it.

Like the majority of his craft, Mr. Desenfans was no doubt zealous in the depreciation of modern talent; but it would appear that his authoritative censure was not restricted to the supposed incompetence of the living professors. It extended, in a spirit of malignant vilification, to the artists of all times, and to the character of the pursuit of painting itself. It would seem that by way of an elaborate *puff* to aid the sale of a collection of pictures which he had got together in the exercise of his vocation, and which he represented as the result of a commission from his then late majesty the king of Poland, he published two *quarto* volumes or bulky pamphlets, by way of a *catalogue raisonné*, of these wonders of the pencil, and interspersed, in the real or pretended history of the pictures described in this elaborate advertisement, a great deal of flippant criticism and bombastic dissertation on the general subject of the art. This valuable work attained the *titular* honours, at least, of a second edition, in which he introduced some passages purporting to be in answer to "the complaints of painters," and apparently aggravating the offences of which he must be presumed to have been guilty, in the first edition, against the dignity or feelings of the profession.

As Mr. Desenfans and his criticisms have been long consigned to that oblivion, of the benefit of which it seems almost uncharitable to deprive them, it would perhaps be nearly as difficult to ascertain, as it would be unprofitable to inquire, how far his assault on the brotherhood of the pencil could be considered as "*dignus vindice nodus*,"—as entitled to call forth the exertion of literary talent, and bring into play the armoury of indignant reproof and biting sarcasm, in the shape of a pamphlet of nearly forty pages, from the pen of one at that time confessedly in the front rank of the body assailed.

At the distance of more than half a century, it is not easy to gauge the amount or intensity of the ephemeral interest, which such apparent trifles as Mr. Desenfans' catalogue, in a given state of circumstances, of which we cannot now seize or appreciate the details, may have created in the world of art. That Mr. Shee, in taking up his pen anonymously in defence of the credit and character of his profession, against this not very dignified assailant, gave utterance to feelings very generally entertained among his brother artists at the time, seems highly probable; and I have reason to believe that the controversy, if so it may be termed, occasioned a good deal of temporary excitement in the circles of taste. There is no doubt that it is to this pamphlet,—entitled "A Letter to Noel Desenfans, Esq., late Consul-General of Poland in Great Britain, occasioned by the second edition of his catalogue, and his answer to what he terms 'the Complaints of Painters,' by a Painter,"—Sir Martin refers, in the concluding paragraph of his "Letter to Joseph Hume, Esq., M.P.," published in 1838, on the occasion of an attack made by the great reformer on the Royal Academy and its President, when

he speaks of "*a lapse of seven-and-thirty years since he first broke a lance with the Vandalism of the day;*" and in the same publication, to which I shall refer more particularly hereafter, a significant allusion to the result on his subsequent literary and professional fortunes, of that chivalrous onslaught on the "Vandalism" in question, sufficiently shows that, even after that lapse of time, he was little disposed to undervalue the topics at issue in the contest, or the importance of the occasion which suggested his participation in the fray.

That Mr. Desenfans' bulky and pompous catalogue was in some respects open to the animadversion, caustic in style, and contemptuous in spirit, with which it was encountered by his energetic antagonist, may, I think, be fairly collected from a few extracts supplied by Mr. Shee, in the margin of his own pamphlet, as affording a necessary explanation of some parts of the text. The following passages may be taken as a sample, which I produce for no other purpose than to render more intelligible those portions of Mr. Shee's *brochure*, which I shall place before the reader, with a view to the illustration of the late President's literary history, and without any desire to resuscitate a defunct controversy.

"How is it," quoth Mr. Desenfans, "that the faculties of the mind attain superior excellence, without the heart improving in like proportion? We, on the contrary, see this corrupt and degenerate, whilst the other soars to perfection; and the annals of the *fine arts* too often present us with impressive examples of this fatal truth."—Catal. vol. i. p. 99.

"By a singular fatality, instead of that noble emulation, the painter is often susceptible of a grovelling envy and a degrading jealousy, which, strange as it may appear, not only augment as he acquires perfection in his art, but also arm his cruel tongue against the meritorious works of his brother artists, as they did

the cruel hand of Cain against his brother Abel."—Vol. i. p. 100.

Again—

"Woe be to the youth with every generous sentiment, and aspiring abilities, who enters on this thorny path! For the rising merit of a painter is as insufferable to the eyes of another as the sunbeams are to the eyes of the owl; and, instead of offering him help and encouragement, the very veterans of the profession will, on his first appearance, pursue and browbeat him as a hornet approaching a hive to rob the bees of their honey; so that the inexperienced candidate has not only to surmount the accumulated difficulties of the art, but a host of artists and unprovoked enemies, and with them injustice and jealousy, whose serpents and vipers are already pouring their poison on his early works."—Vol. i. p. 100.

While thus uncourteous, not to say scurrilous, in his treatment of the living, Mr. Desenfans was, it appears, scarcely more respectful to the memory of the mighty dead; and certain observations of a contemptuous cast and libellous tendency, applied to the character of Rembrandt and others of the old masters, with a flippant criticism on Hogarth, in which the claims of that immortal genius to be considered *a painter* were called in question (!), contributed powerfully to draw down on the discursive and self-satisfied critic, that severe castigation from the pen of Mr. Shee, of which I now subjoin a few passages not unworthy of the literary reputation which he subsequently achieved, by its exercise on more interesting and more important occasions:—

"It may be asked, perhaps, by *unseasonable* curiosity, why you could not have set off your wares to the best advantage—why you could not have exercised your literary ingenuity in that art so humorously illustrated in the 'Critic' by the great dramatist of the day, and in which your talents are not only

unequalled, but *undisputed*,—it may be asked, in short, why you could not have invited the public to the performance of that *Polish farce* which has been so many years in preparation for them, *got up* at great expense, and *rehearsed* on two former occasions, with new *scenes*, *dresses*, and *decorations*, without wantonly volunteering an attack on a profession to which you owe whatever *consequence* you may imagine yourself to possess,—without raking, with filthy and offensive industry, in the foul jokes of exploded scurrility for dirt with which to bespatter the long venerated shades of departed genius?—why you could not contentedly hug yourself in the enjoyment of that affluence you have procured from their labours, without officiously blurting in the public face idle and discreditable tales to their disgrace?—tales originally invented by scandal, preserved in the literary lumber-rooms of babbling biographers, and hashed up to *serve a purpose*, as an offering at the shrine of that malignant curiosity, which ever prompts the proud and the mean to devour with eagerness, whatever tends to lower greatness or to lessen merit.

"It has hitherto been the practice of liberal minds, to treat with respect and affection the characters of those who have adorned the ages in which they lived, and left to posterity the monuments of their genius or their virtue. Grateful for the benefits derived from their wisdom,—for the pleasures provided for us by their ingenuity,—we have been taught to consider their foibles with indulgence—to turn with generous alacrity from the frailties of the man, to the perfections of the genius, and lose sight of all which can lessen our respect for the one, or our admiration for the other.

"*Your* morality, sir, teaches you a different lesson, and leads you to believe that no circumstances in the life of a great man are of so much importance, or can be half so *interesting*, as those which tend to vilify and degrade him—which excite contempt for his understanding, or abhorrence of his heart.

"It was reserved for you, sir, in the boldness of your biographical presumption, to pique yourself on reviving the forgotten libels on great characters—on retailing a *hodge-podge* of contemptible anecdotes, which, if doubtful, *common justice*

would consign to oblivion; and, if true, generosity would grieve to relate."—Letter to Noel Desenfans, Esq., p. 12 *et seq.*

Farther on, he says:—

"We painters, sir, are in the habit of hearing and of reading much curious disquisition on the subject of our art; and our ears are become callous to the unmeaning jingle of misplaced technicals, and the pedantic jargon of distempered criticism. The temple of taste is, indeed, peculiarly exposed to the intrusion of the ignorant and superficial; for

"'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.'

"It is, unhappily, the sanctuary of charlatans and impostors, who, culprits against reason and common sense, in the inferior departments of life, take refuge within its precincts and are safe.

"But however *cruel, grovellingly* envious, and *jealous* we may be, sir (on your *respected* authority), amongst ourselves, I may, without flattery, assert that we possess in no common degree, the power of bearing with true Christian patience, much *bad language* and worse criticism from *dilettante* quacks and *picture-dealing connoisseurs*. . . . . This pacific, forbearing temper, under yet greater provocations, is really general amongst us; and I will venture to say that we could have heard *even you*, sir, expatiate with all that *eloquence* and critical *acumen* you possess, on the principles of our profession, with the most decorous gravity, and placid resignation, had you confined yourself to those *refined* speculations which are so much the fashion of the day, and nearly as harmless to the public taste, as they are, no doubt, *entertaining* to those who produce them.

"You have taken upon you, sir, to slander, as far as in you lies, a body of men, of whom it may be justly said, that they are never slighted but by ignorance, nor insulted but by brutality. You have arraigned them at the bar of the public, as guilty of the most degrading, the most contemptible malignity, and ransacked your poetical imagination for figures to enforce the charge. *Thorny paths, hornets and hives, serpents and vipers, owls and sunbeams,*—all the metaphors of malignity (to imitate

a passage of a celebrated writer) shine through the virulent dulness of your page in a *blaze* of abusive illustration.

"But happily, sir, your impression is not equal to your zeal. Your authority, as an evidence in this case, bears no proportion to your powers as a *rhetorician;* and it is not the first time that a malicious charge has recoiled upon him who preferred it, and that the culprit has been found in the accuser.

. . . . . .

"You have, indeed, sir, in your new office of *censor* of our defects, brandished your pen with much unnecessary violence. You have flourished your weapon around you with all that wanton indifference that denotes eager, *unsparing* offence; and, according to the old observation, he who strikes the first blow must abide by the issue of the battle.

"In vain would you attempt to contract the extent of your attack, by *unknown exceptions,* or mental reservations. Your censure (such as it is), is *general;* and the man who throws his brand into a crowd, deserves to have it thrust in his face by the first hand that can seize it."—*Ibid,* p. 29, *et seq.*

In spite of the provocation which Mr. Desenfans had given to the profession at large, he considered, or affected to consider, himself much aggrieved by the tone and spirit in which his unknown assailant had dealt with his character and pretensions. He even talked loudly and minaciously of his anxiety to discover and unmask his "anonymous libeller," and his resolve to obtain redress or atonement for the "slanderous attack" made upon him.

The immediate result of this display of formidable ire, was a direct communication from Mr. Shee, proclaiming himself the author of the pamphlet, and assuring Mr. Desenfans of his determination to abide by its contents, and his perfect willingness to encounter

any "consequences" which might result from the promptings of Mr. D.'s wounded honour or feelings, on the occasion. The reader will not be surprised to learn that the irate *connoisseur* did not deem it advisable to act on the information thus spontaneously afforded to him, by adopting hostile measures, but prudently allowed Mr. Shee's communication to remain without notice or comment.

The year 1802 was a remarkable epoch in Sir Martin's professional history; as in the autumn of that year, by virtue of the cessation of hostilities consequent on the treaty of Amiens, he visited Paris, and enjoyed the great benefit of viewing, and studying attentively, the concentrated splendours of European art, at that time displayed in rich profusion, in the spacious galleries of the Louvre, and constituting the most glorious triumphs of the military skill and success of Napoleon, then the absolute ruler of France, under the comparatively modest title of, First Consul of the Republic, "*Une et indivisible.*"

Great as are still the attractions of the Louvre to any foreign visitor who takes an interest in the fine arts, its present condition can convey no adequate idea of the spectacle it offered, in those days, to the admiring eyes of the painter or sculptor, who there found collected within the walls of a single palace, all, or nearly all, those priceless gems of art, which, theretofore scattered in different and distant localities, had separately formed the pride and glory of museums and galleries far remote from each other, where they were exultingly displayed and guarded with a species of religious reverence.

If the ordinary traveller, impelled by curiosity or *désœuvrement*, and in search of amusement, eagerly seized

the opportunity presented by the peace, to visit the gay capital,—whose fascinations,—once familiar to the wealthy and aristocratic tourist,—had for the previous ten years been mere matter of brilliant tradition to the great mass of English society, it may well be imagined that to the painter, inspired by a true feeling for his art, and earnestly desirous of improvement in the theory and practice of his profession, the attraction of Paris, so favoured and adorned, was all but irresistible. Accordingly, on the arrival of the dead season in London, there was something approaching to a simultaneous migration of the great body of English artists, from the President of the Royal Academy downwards, across the channel; all bound for the Louvre, with the devotion of pilgrims seeking the shrine of the Apostles at the time of a jubilee.

Such an expedition was, in those days, attended with an amount of trouble, and an outlay of time and money in travelling, strongly contrasting with the locomotive facilities of our time; and as Mr. Shee was induced to undertake this expensive "sentimental journey" from motives exclusively and conscientiously professional, it was to him matter of financial prudence and most disagreeable necessity, to make his pilgrimage *en garçon*.

To one so thoroughly domestic in his wishes and enjoyments, an absence of even a few weeks from his happy home, was a prospect fraught with a degree of anxiety and annoyance, which the professional enthusiasm excited by the thought of contemplating the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus de' Medici, and the Transfiguration, served but imperfectly to lighten. He was, however, socially fortunate in the circumstances under which he started on his journey, having for his travelling companion, the accomplished author of the

"Pleasures of Memory," the late Samuel Rogers. With this distinguished citizen of the republic of letters, and conspicuous ornament of the *beau monde*,—a man no less estimable from the sterling worth of his character, in all the friendly relations of life, than remarkable for the witty and not always very good-natured *causticity* of his conversation,—Mr. Shee had been for some time on terms of great intimacy;—an intimacy which, with no greater interruption than necessarily arose from the partially estranging effects of laborious and obligatory pursuits on the one side, and the equally engrossing business of amusement, however intellectual and refined, among the *élite* of society, on the other, was continued with mutual satisfaction and esteem, until dissolved by death.

In the present day, Paris, as we know, can be reached with ease in twelve hours' journey from London. In September 1802, Mr. Shee and his companion, travelling post with all reasonable despatch, started from London on Monday morning, and arrived in Paris at two o'clock on Saturday. But the additional time occupied in the journey could hardly be grudged, and was not ill-bestowed, in traversing somewhat leisurely a country where everything was new to the English traveller of that day, and where so many objects of historical, political, and picturesque interest presented themselves to his eager eye and excited curiosity, either directly on his line of *route*, or within view of some point of those interminable straight lines of high road, on the rough *pavé* of which he was leisurely jolted on his onward course to Paris.

The changes, social, political, and architectural, which have taken place in France, and especially in Paris, since the period of the peace of Amiens, have been so

extensive, that, well-known as are the present appearance and condition of the French capital and its inhabitants, to the majority of English readers, the first impressions of an intelligent traveller as to the physical and moral aspect of things in France in the year 1802, may perhaps be not wholly uninteresting, as recorded at the time in his own unaffected, but occasionally striking and energetic language. A few selections from Mr. Shee's domestic correspondence during his stay at Paris, and an extract or two from a slight and hasty journal which he kept of his daily proceedings, from the day of his departure, may therefore, I trust, be appropriately introduced in this place.

To Mrs. Archer Shee.

"Paris, Sunday night, part written on Saturday night,
"Hôtel des Étrangers, Rue Vivienne.

"Here am I in Paris! within a dozen yards of the Palais Royal—in the very centre of taste, attraction, and dissipation—in the very core of that heart from which circulates the life-blood of luxury to the utmost extremities of civilisation—and after a journey which would have been everything I could have desired but for two things—your absence, and the expense. The first made me melancholy—the last set me mad. Every guinea I spend while away from you seems to accuse me of profligacy. Every pleasure I partake of in which you do not participate seems culpable. I always admired Goldsmith's lines, but I never *felt* their beauty before, for, believe me, I have dragged from London to Paris a *lengthening chain.* But I will reserve an account of my feeling to a better opportunity, and proceed to inform you of what you are more desirous to know. I wrote from Calais an account of my arrival there, which I hope you have received. On quitting the packet, we were obliged to deliver our passports to be signed by the commissary, when his leisure and his pleasure might permit, a form which, by some exertion, we got through by ten o'clock the next morning. My

fellow-traveller* had the offer of a place in a private carriage to Paris, which he declined, to accompany me. This, of course, tied me to him too fast for the ordinary considerations of economy to operate. But a *painter* should never travel with a banker.† . . . Suffice it to say I left *my ten guineas on the road.* We are *much deceived as to the expenses* of travelling in France, by the accounts we hear in London; and I find from Farington, and the other artists here, that they found their journey equally beyond their estimate or their intentions.

. . . . . .

I have hired an apartment for fifteen days, for three guineas, in a very good situation, near the museum, in a very respectable hotel; and, altogether, as comfortable as I could wish, and, I understand, as cheap as I could possibly expect. I have for the sum a bed-room, a sitting-room, and an ante-chamber—one within the other. (Take notice, this is the style of things in Paris. A single room is not to be had in a hotel, but in situations adapted for servants and inferior people.) To be sure, I am rather elevated, but that to me is no objection. The moment I had found a nest, I flew like a bird to the museum, where, without prejudice or exaggeration, I may say I have been astonished. Description has fallen far short of the splendour, the extent, and the merit of this great national museum of art. We have in England a few scattered stars of art; but here there is a constellation, a perfect galaxy, in which the eye is lost, without the hope of numbering the whole, or noting the half of them. Tell our friend Ellis‡ that I every hour regret

* Mr. Rogers.

† Mr. Rogers was at that time, and, I believe, to the end of his life, a sleeping partner in a wealthy firm of London bankers.

‡ Ellis Ellis, Esq., of Lloyd's:—a name as distinguished in the mercantile world for commercial ability and integrity, as its owner was conspicuous in social life for the quaint humour, caustic wit, and unfailing flow of spirits that characterised his conversation, and imparted a peculiar charm to his society, which no one who was acquainted with him can ever forget. He was also a man of the most refined and cultivated taste. During the greater part of a very long life, he was the most intimate friend and associate of Sir Martin. He died but recently, at the advanced age of ninety-two.

he did not come with me. Since I left London, to this moment, the weather has been delightful as possible. I am but thirty-six hours in Paris, of which seven have been spent in the museum, five in bed. I have seen the National Library, the Palais Royal, the Tuileries, the Champs-Elysées, the Pantheon, the Monnaye, the College of Four Nations, the Manége, to which poor Louis fled for refuge to the Convention; I have been at the opera, and at Frascati; so I think you will say I have not been idle. . . . Paris pleases me much, and surprises me more. London is a city of shops, and Paris an assemblage of palaces. The one is comfort and convenience rising into elegance; the other seems splendour and magnificence falling to decay. Paris is a city for a painter to *look at*—LONDON is the place for him to live in."

In Paris he found many of his brother academicians, including the President, Mr. West; Messrs. Fuseli, Hoppner, Farington, Cosway, Turner, &c., besides some other English friends and acquaintances; and being the bearer of letters of introduction to several persons of conspicuous position in the scientific, literary, and artistic circles of the place, he enjoyed during his stay every additional advantage and *agrément*, which pleasant and highly intellectual society could impart to a visit in itself so full of interest to an artist and a British subject. But neither the social attractions nor the numerous objects of general attention and curiosity by which he was surrounded, could divert his mind from the chief and paramount purpose of his expedition, viz.: the thoughtful study of the wonders of art collected in the *musée*. The entries in his journal bear convincing testimony to the persevering and assiduous attention, with which he availed himself of the opportunity thus afforded him, of becoming thoroughly acquainted with those masterpieces of the pencil and

the chisel, so long the objects of his fervent admiration,—even in such imperfect reproduction of their beauties as could be effected by the agency of engravings and casts,—and endeavouring, by the careful and critical comparisons of schools and styles, made in reference to the most favourable examples, to enlarge and expand his views of what was truly excellent in art,—to correct the bias of overweening partiality to one species of merit, as deserving to be eagerly sought at the expense of others—and, in fine, to prevent legitimate and devout admiration from degenerating into fanaticism or idolatry.

Among the eminent persons to whom he was introduced by letter, on the occasion of this visit to Paris, were the Comte de Lasteyrie, whose *salons* were at that period the favourite resort of all that was most distinguished in art, science, and literature,—and Monsieur Mérimée, a member of the Institute, and a painter of considerable reputation, whose claims to the notice of posterity are enhanced by the fact of his being the father of Prosper Mérimée. To the amiable and seasonable attention of M. Mérimée, *père*, Mr. Shee, as will be seen, was indebted for one of the most interesting and gratifying occurrences connected with his visit, viz.: the opportunity of seeing and closely observing the First Consul, during a protracted ceremonial, and in a position which afforded unusual facilities for judging, not only of his personal appearance and demeanour, but of his acuteness and practical knowledge, in matters of some importance to the commercial and industrial interests of the nation subject to his sway.

The following memoranda are extracted from Mr. Shee's journal, and will convey an accurate idea of the manner in which his time in Paris was employed.

"Monday. The museum in the morning at nine . . . . . Delivered my letter to M. de Lasteyrie. Weather very hot. Spent the rest of the morning in the gallery of statues. Dined with L—— and Mr. Howard at a *restaurateur's*. Went afterwards to the Théâtre Montpensier, Palais Royal. A dirty house, less than Covent Garden, and apparently a vulgar audience, B——[name illegible, probably *Brunet*] an excellent actor, much in the manner of Edwin. Home, much tired, at eleven.

"Thursday. M. Mérimée returned my visit at eight o'clock in the morning. Appointed to meet him at Mr. Cosway's, at half-past eight, to go to the museum. Mr. M. procured me daily entrance at eight o'clock every morning. Remained in the gallery till twelve. Went to the Palais Royal to meet L—— by appointment. Thence to the gate of the Tuileries, where I saw the Corps Législatif go in a body to the Consul's levée. An ill-looking, vulgar set of men, oddly dressed. Went to the Champs Elysées. Crowds of people. *Mât de cocagne, jeu de bague,* circus, &c. Dined at half-past four at a *restaurateur's*. 1.10. Took a cup of coffee, and sallied out to view the illuminations. Magnificent in the Tuileries and Champ de Mars. Four orchestras—eighteen or twenty performers each—in different parts of the garden. A grand concert at the gate of the Tuileries, in the open air, by about fifty performers. Vast crowds—dances and diversions without number—without riot or confusion.

"Friday. In the museum at half-past seven in the morning. Almost two hours alone. Admitted to see the 'Transfiguration.' Went to meet M. Mérimée in the Cour du Louvre—brought round to see the productions of national industry. Told by M. Mérimée, that if I met him at the Louvre, dressed, at two o'clock, we should see the First Consul. Attended accordingly with Hoppner; introduced to M. Vincent, one of the best artists here, who behaved with the greatest politeness. His sketches of the 'Battle of the Pyramids,' good. Proceeded with Messrs. Vincent and Mérimée to the Consular Palace. Introduced into the presence-chamber, where I saw the medals distributed to the different candidates, and had the pleasure of standing for an hour and twenty minutes within

six feet of Bonaparte, and without any other person intervening to obstruct my view, being one of the front line in a circle composed of the three consuls, the generals, senators, and councillors of state, with the members of the Institute, forming the jury which decided the distribution of the prizes. This long and complete view of Bonaparte is a favour which no other strangers, however high their rank, have been able to obtain. A regular introduction to him would have only given the opportunity of a short observation or a slight bow; but to stand for more than an hour, face to face with him, to examine him from head to foot with perfect convenience and leisure, to hear him talk, and study his character through all its pacific changes, was an advantage for which many curious strangers here would have given five hundred pounds. Bonaparte is scarcely taller than I am, and much thinner. His figure is not very good. His face is, in my eyes, handsome, sedate, steady, and determined. The prints of him do him no sort of justice. When you see him, you are satisfied that such a man may be Bonaparte, the conqueror of Italy, the grand monarch of France, and the pacificator of Europe. In short, nothing could be more impressive and interesting than the whole scene. At half-past four dined at Véry's, where I had been invited by Boddington, Sharpe, and Rogers, to meet West, the other artists, &c. An admirable dinner, though in the French style. At eight o'clock went to M. Lasteyrie's. Many people of all countries. Much conversation. Nothing of that reserve on particular subjects, which I had been led to expect. Returned home at eleven.

"Saturday. In the museum at eight. Met L—— at one, to go see David's pictures of the 'Horatii,' his 'Brutus,' and 'Portrait of Bonaparte.' David has no feeling of the higher kind of art, no eye for colour, and no powers of execution. He draws well, however, and has, I think, a good knowledge of composition. His merit as an artist is, I think, always over-rated or under-rated. I find him neither so good nor so bad a painter as I have heard him described. As a portrait painter he is almost contemptible.

"Sunday. Morning in the museum. Went at twelve, in hopes of seeing High Mass in Notre Dame. But having been informed as to the hour, it was over before I arrived. The church, a heavy Gothic structure, not to be compared to the abbey*, the cathedrals at Canterbury or Amiens. Went from Notre Dame to the Petits Augustins, where there is a noble assemblage of monumental ability and antiquarian treasure, that surpasses everything I have seen in a similar way. . . . . Returned to the museum at half-past two.

"Monday. . . . . Went to West's public breakfast, where were Lady Oxford†, Miss Williams‡, Madame Lebrun, Mesdames Gérard and Vincent, Mrs. Cosway, &c. Lord Oxford, Erskine, senior and junior, Rogers, Sharpe, Boddington, Kemble, Farington, &c. MM. Vincent, Forbin, Gérard, Dénon, and a number of others. Was introduced to many of the French artists, and scraped an acquaintance with Lady Oxford. Promised La Vallais, secretary of the museum, to meet him in the gallery to-morrow morning. Drank tea with L——; went at eight to Miss Williams's, where I met all those English people I had met in the morning at West's. Was introduced to A. O'C§, saw Joel Barton and many others.

"Tuesday. Went at eight to the museum; remained till one. Called on Mdlle. J—— [name illegible] to see her pictures. Met at two, by appointment, M. la Vallais, who took me to see Guérin, the painter, and a work he is at present engaged on, from the Phèdre and Hyppolite of Racine. Guérin, through a bad colorist, a better eye for hue than David.

* *i. e.*, apparently, Westminster Abbey.

† The Countess of Oxford, one of the most celebrated beauties of her day. She was the mother of the late Earl, on whose death, a few years back, the earldom of Oxford and Mortimer, conferred by Queen Anne on her celebrated minister Harley, became extinct.

‡ Helen Maria Williams, an authoress and political writer of great reputation in the early part of this century.

§ These initials are no doubt intended to designate Arthur O'Connor, — a name well known in the Irish rebellion of 1798.

"Wednesday. . . . . Went to the gallery, where I remained from half-past eleven till half-past four.

. . . . . .

"Thursday. Rose at half-past six; called on my fellow-traveller at eight to settle accounts, and found that my journey to Paris cost just *fourteen guineas*.

. . . . . .

"Monday. Rose at seven. Going to the museum at nine, I met M. Grégoire coming to pay me a visit. He appeared much pleased to see me, and regretted I had not called upon him before. I made my excuses on the score that I was unwilling to trespass on his time, which I knew was so much better employed. We walked together to the museum, and then up and down the gallery for about two hours. He wished me very much to stay a week longer for the sitting of the National Institute, to which he would introduce me; and, in short, proposed so many things for my gratification, that I was obliged, after thanking him warmly, to say that the little remaining time I had to stay I was obliged to devote to my professional views in the gallery; that next autumn I proposed repeating my visit to Paris, and that he would be the first person to whom I should pay my respects. He then took leave, saying he hoped to see me in London the ensuing spring.

. . . . . .

Remained in the museum till half-past two o'clock.

. . . . . .

"Wednesday. Rose at seven. . . . . Went to the gallery at ten o'clock; remained till two, at which time I had appointed to take Miss G——, Messrs. Fuseli, Farington, Boddington, and Sharpe, to see Guérin and the picture he is at present painting. Guérin we all considered the best of the modern French school. He has a good feeling of expression and character. More freedom of execution, and a better eye for colour and light and shade, than any French artist we have seen. Returned to the gallery with Farington.

. . . . . .

Called on Farington at half-past six, as he requested, as a favour, that I would go to the Théâtre Français with him to

see Talma, the great French tragedian. To this I agreed the more readily, as I thought I ought not myself to quit Paris without seeing him. We went there accordingly, and were altogether much entertained. Talma is an actor of great powers, a good face, a commanding figure. His action is vigorous and dignified, but partaking too much of the strut and pomposity of tragedy in all countries. His changes of voice and manner are various and impressive; and on the whole, making allowance for the French style of acting, which, like everything else in the nation, is a kind of *bravura*, I am not surprised at Talma's high reputation. We were lucky in seeing him in one of his most celebrated parts;—Orosmane in Voltaire's tragedy of "Zaire." Zaire was performed by a young actress who has lately made her *début*. She has a pleasing person and countenance, but no great power. She in some respects resembles Miss Brunton *; but without her spirit and fire. Her name is Volney."

. . . . . .

His general impression of Paris is more fully recorded in a letter, which, on the day of his return to London, he addressed to his aunt Mrs. Dillon, some portions of which are here subjoined.

"London, 13th Oct. 1802.

"My dear Aunt,—On my arrival in London this day, George handed me your kind letter. . . . . I dare say that you were somewhat surprised to learn that I had set off to Paris; and, indeed, I have often been surprised at it myself. Mary and George were my instigators, and allowed me no peace till they persuaded me to a step which they thought was essential to my *consequence* as an artist, and my character as a *man of taste*. Indeed, the emigration of the whole Academy, with the President at their head, and particularly the visits to Paris made about this time by my competitors in portrait painting, made it a sort of necessity on my part; as, not to have visited the trea-

* Afterwards married to the Earl of Craven.

sures of art in Paris, will be a sort of stigma on the character of a painter or a *connoisseur*. I therefore set out in company with a Mr. Rogers, a banker and celebrated poet here; and, after a pleasant journey of five days (two hours and three quarters of which were spent in the passage from Dover to Calais), arrived safe in Paris. . . . Paris, as to its houses, its habits, and its inhabitants, is a kind of new world to a stranger from our islands, more splendid, more magnificent than London, but by no means so neat, so comfortable, or so large,—more populous for its size, more crowded in its streets, more numerous and gorgeous in its palaces and public buildings, and more liberal and extensive in all its public establishments. The whole city built of stone, or stuccoed to resemble it; the people exhibiting the ludicrous in all its varieties, at once elegant and *outré*, carrying fashion to its extreme, and setting caricature at defiance. An inconsistent mixture of meanness and magnificence runs through the whole nation, that alternately excites our ridicule and our admiration. The rage of ornament is the passion of the place. It pervades all ranks, and spreads over the whole country, in a torrent of false taste and frippery profusion. Hotels splendid as palaces; palaces filthy as pigsties; every man with ear-rings and whiskers meeting under his chin; every woman, from Madame Bonaparte, at St. Cloud, to the oyster wench who attends the tables of an eating-house, with pendants reaching to her shoulders, a sparkling cross or locket on her breast, and her hair turned up *à la grecque*. The plunder of the world has enriched Paris with treasures of art beyond number and above praise. In short, Italy is now in Paris. Politically speaking, there is about as much freedom in France as in Algiers. The word of the little great man is law and gospel.

"'His smile is fortune, and his frown is fate.

"All ranks execrate the revolution without ceremony or concealment. The trees of liberty are everywhere either torn up or decayed. The term 'citizen,' though still retained in their public addresses, is considered almost an affront in private

life, as expressive of everything degrading, and reminding them of everything disagreeable. The manners, the appearance, the dress of the French, everything, in short, is fast returning to the character of old times; and I am much mistaken if the word *liberty* will not shortly be as much laughed at in France, as the thing itself has been abused there. I had a better opportunity of seeing Bonaparte than almost any other stranger in Paris; for I was an hour and twenty minutes in the presence-chamber, within six feet of him, the other Consuls on each side of him, and surrounded by his whole court in full dress. The occasion was also interesting—the report of the committee appointed to decide the prizes to be given to the first specimens of national ingenuity. As one of this committee, I had interest enough to be introduced, and had full leisure for observation. Bonaparte is not taller, and much thinner than I am. A fine expressive face—his whole deportment denoting good sense—his manners easy and dignified, without the least appearance of suspicion or mistrust."

In a letter to Mrs. Shee, written during his stay in Paris, containing an account of the ceremonial described above, he thus speaks of Napoleon's appearance. "He is a little man, with a face which for character, thought, and unaffected dignity, I have never seen surpassed. The portraits of him we have seen degrade him, and scarce give an idea of his expression."

It was in the course of this visit to Paris, that Mr. Shee made the acquaintance of two distinguished men who were, at that time, respectively the pride and ornament of the bar, in England and in Ireland, and whose names are indissolubly connected with all that is most brilliant in the social, as well as the forensic traditions of the two countries,—the Hon. Thomas (afterwards Lord) Erskine, and John Philpot Curran. With the former he had subsequently but little intercourse, beyond such casual association as an occasional

meeting at the dinner-table of some one of those who love to assemble at their festive board the various "*notabilities*" of the time, would naturally involve; but his introduction to the Irish orator and wit led to a permanent intimacy between them. In common with most Irishmen, Mr. Shee felt no slight degree of national pride in the oratorical fame of one whom, in the letter which mentions the commencement of their acquaintance, he describes as "the Irish Erskine;" and Mr. Curran, on his part, was certainly fully alive to the social and literary qualifications which, in conjunction with his claims as an artist, bade fair, even at that time, to place the subject of this biography in the most conspicuous ranks of Irish talent.

Before quitting the subject of his visit to Paris, I am tempted to record a slight anecdote which he would frequently relate as connected with his reminiscences of that capital, and affording an amusing illustration of the social peculiarities of our Gallic neighbours, especially of that *pseudo-philosophical* coxcombry so ludicrously prevalent during the republic. Having occasion for the services of a *coiffeur*, Mr. Shee one morning entered the *salon* of one of these "*decorative artists*" in the Palais Royal, and submitted his head to the prompt and tasteful attention of the *bourgeois*, or some equally enlightened *élève* of the establishment. During the process of curling and powdering "*secundum artem*,"—in those days a very elaborate performance—the operator, who, like most of his fraternity throughout the civilised world, was impulsively chatty, and spontaneously communicative, engaged his patient in animated converse on the political and social questions of the day; his loquacity no doubt experiencing an additional stimulus from

the fact of its being developed for the benefit of a foreigner. In the course of this edifying commentary on "things in general," Mr. Shee took occasion to notice the recent re-establishment of Christianity, and the restoration of public worship by an ordinance of the state. "*Que voulez-vous, monsieur?*" observed the *barbier-philosophe*, with an expressive shrug. "*C'était inévitable.* Among the enlightened classes of society, religion may be dispensed with. You and I, *monsieur*, for example, *we* know our duties, and can be depended on for their performance. But, *je vous le demande*, what *are* you to do with the *ignorant and vulgar?*"

CHAPTER VII.

1802—1809.

Exhibition of 1803. — The Prince of Wales. — Introduction to his Royal Highness. — Alarm of Invasion. — Volunteer Movement. — Attempt of Mr. Shee to organise an Academic Corps. — Project not acceptable to the Senior R.A.'s. — Change of Plan. — He raises a Corps of Artists. — Communication with the Government.—Unrestricted offer of Service.—Satisfaction of the Minister. — Offer declined. — Joins the Bloomsbury Regiment. — Decline of the Movement. — "Rhymes on Art."— Great Success of the Poem. — Its effect on the World of Taste. — The British Institution. — "Elements of Art."

THE years 1803 and 1804 were not marked by any occurrence connected with Mr. Shee's professional career, of sufficient interest or importance to require the notice of the biographer. That he was not losing ground, either in the estimation of the world of taste, or in his own opinion, may be fairly inferred from his account of the contributions supplied by him to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1803, concerning which he thus expresses himself in a letter to Mrs. Dillon, written apparently in the month of April in that year.

"I have delayed my letter somewhat longer than usual, in consequence of preparing for the exhibition, as that notorious '*thief of time*,' procrastination, has stolen so much from me, that I have been obliged to apply almost night and day to supply the deficiency. I hope, however, I have worked to some purpose, and that I am in a better condition than usual to take the field with effect. My forces consist of *three* whole-

lengths (one more than I ever exhibited before), one half-length, and two heads. First, a large whole-length of Lord Moira, in uniform, in the attitude of speaking in the House; second, a whole-length of Miss Lee (a pretty girl), as Ophelia in Hamlet; third, a whole-length of a Mrs. Williamson: a three-quarters portrait of Lord Spencer, which is said to be the strongest and most flattering likeness ever painted of him; a ditto of General Tonyn; and a half-length of Mrs. Hughes. I think you may now say you have seen the exhibition, as far as I am concerned."

Of the works here enumerated, two have been engraved, viz., the portraits of Lord Moira (afterwards the first Marquess of Hastings) and General Tonyn, a distinguished veteran who, if I mistake not, had seen the bloody fields of Fontenoy and Minden. Lord Moira's portrait is well known by the engraving. It was, I believe, generally considered an admirable likeness of the gallant, generous, and truly chivalrous nobleman in question.

The portrait of General Tonyn was one of those broadly and strongly-painted heads, which judiciously render all that is most striking in the character of dignified and vigorous old age, where the furrows of time are deepened and hallowed by the visible lines of thought, and the light of intellect shines out, with a calm and steady ray, from under the massive brows of reflection and experience. The accuracy of the likeness having been observed and loudly noticed, at the private view, by the Prince of Wales, the President, Mr. West, took occasion to introduce Mr. Shee, as the painter of the portrait, to the notice of his Royal Highness, who thereupon addressed him with some complimentary observations, and detained him in conversation for a few minutes. I mention this circumstance, chiefly in reference to the fact that, although on many subsequent occasions, pub-

lic and private, Mr. Shee had the honour of being in company with the Prince, the interview in question was the only personal communication he ever had with His Royal Highness, afterwards King George IV. His impression, however, derived from that short colloquy, of the peculiar grace and charm of manner for which that august personage was so conspicuous, was in perfect accordance with the experience of those who had more frequent opportunities of observing the Royal demeanour;—nor,—as far as pre-eminence in the exhibition of a graceful and courteously dignified deportment, can be considered as entitling its possessor to the distinction of so comprehensive an epithet,—would he have been disposed to question His Royal Highness's claim to the title of "The first gentleman in Europe."

The threatening aspect of Continental politics, about this period, when all men were in expectation of a descent on our shores by the armies of the first Napoleon, produced an engrossing effect on the public mind and feeling of the day, to the great discouragement of the more peaceful and ornamental pursuits of life. But, however he might deplore the necessity of this state of things, Mr. Shee was the last person who could reasonably complain of its existence, as he more than fully shared in that patriotic pre-occupation which was, for the time, attended with such paralysing results to the interests of art and literature. A feeling of warlike enthusiasm animated all grades of society, and exhibited itself in the formation of numerous regiments of volunteers, the rank-and-file of which were supplied, not merely by persons in the condition of tradesmen or shopkeepers, but, to a very great extent, by the opulent classes of London, and the majority of those who were

engaged in learned and liberal professions, and the higher mercantile pursuits.

At such a crisis, no able-bodied man and loyal subject, who loved his country, valued its institutions, and appreciated the comfort and security of his domestic hearth, could fairly hold himself excused from contributing the quota of his physical energies and personal prowess, to the aggregate of the public defences. All political disagreements,—all sectarian animosities,—all minor nationalities were, for the moment, forgotten or merged in the nobler feelings and more expansive sympathies of British loyalty and national independence. The present volunteer-rifle movement, however energetic in its purpose and extensive in its operation, based, as it is, on more hypothetical and remote contingencies of national danger, affords no accurate measure of the amount of military ardour pervading the social atmosphere in those days.

The maxim "*Cedant arma togæ*" was practically reversed throughout the busiest and most peaceable classes of the vast London world; and it may be well believed that the universal display of zeal and awkwardness, which distinguished the daily musterings of these warlike *amateurs*, was such as no patriotic philosopher could contemplate without admiration, and no smart drill-serjeant could witness with gravity. Every moment that could be safely abstracted from the duties of his ordinary vocation, was devoted by the eager patriot to the study of the manual exercise, and the practice of military evolutions; and not a few whom previous sedentary habits, advancing age, or increasing corpulency seemed peculiarly to disqualify for the discipline of the parade and the guard-room, were as persevering in their attempts to overcome the difficulties of the goose-step,

and master the more formidable gymnastics involved in the expert use of the musket, as the most youthful and active of their fellow-recruits.

In the midst of this widely-spread patriotic movement among the various classes and interests of society, it was not to be expected that the arts should escape the warlike contagion; and when it is remembered that the subject of this biography was in the full vigour of early manhood, and, as an Irishman of undoubted Milesian descent, could not be wholly exempt from those pugnacious impulses which, properly directed, develop themselves in so much that is chivalrous in the national character,—that, moreover, he had been brought up among traditions of the most unquestioning and romantic loyalty,—it will be less matter of surprise that the fervour of his patriotic and loyal feelings should have somewhat exceeded the mean temperature of the public enthusiasm, and, unlike the average amount of heroic ardour, which found a satisfactory vent in the restricted duties of the ordinary volunteer corps, impelled him to a wider field of action, and more energetic demonstrations of that zeal which the great national emergency was calculated to arouse.

Whatever may be thought of the discretion or prudence of such a project, it is certain that he contemplated raising, and was actually very successful in his efforts to raise, a corps composed entirely of artists, to be equipped and accoutred at their own expense, for the service of the crown; and to be employed, not merely, as in the case of other volunteer regiments, within the limits of the island of Great Britain, but upon any military service, domestic or foreign, in which the Government might consider their prowess likely to be effectual or beneficial.

His original plan was, not unnaturally, confined to the ranks of the Royal Academy, the whole body of which, academicians, associates, and students, he was desirous of enrolling in a small but, as he hoped, enthusiastic band of patriotic defenders. But before he decided on bringing the project forward in a formal and official shape, he thought it advisable to broach it in private conversation with the majority of those on whom would rest the responsibility of its adoption or rejection, in the event of his submitting it to the deliberation of the general body.

Among the more youthful R. A.'s, the idea was received and entertained with more or less alacrity ; but a large proportion, perhaps the majority of the "forty," were men past the middle period of life; not a few were far advanced in years; and many were doubtless of opinion that there was nothing in the character of their peaceful profession, which rendered it incumbent on them, as artists, to volunteer, as a body, for the performance of military duties more extensive and dangerous than any which would be imposed on the individual loyal subject who, in order to qualify himself for the defence of the metropolis, might join the St. James's or Marylebone regiment of volunteer infantry.

The truth is, that whether the plan of the proposed academic armament were or were not calculated to strike terror to the hearts of the invading foe, its ventilation at Somerset House produced no inconsiderable amount of internal panic. Some of the less adventurous of the R. A.'s, indeed, did not hesitate, in after years, to acknowledge to Mr. Shee that his scheme had, at the time, appeared to them suggestive of the most sinister auguries, and big with the most calamitous results. They confessed that although, in proposing the plan to

their consideration, he had dwelt merely on the dangers that threatened the state from the camp at Boulogne, they had, as they thought, detected in his recommendation of the unrestricted offer of service and duty, which was to be the distinguishing characteristic of the Academic Legion, a covert design on his part to induce the Government to employ them in quelling the remains of insurrection in Ireland; the memory of the outbreak connected with the revolutionary projects of the unhappy Robert Emmet in the year 1802, being still fresh in the memory of the English public.

The result of this attempt to feel the academic pulse on so momentous a question was, as far as Mr. Shee was concerned, a conviction that it would be impossible for him to carry into effect his chivalrous design in a strictly official or corporate form, as regarded the members of the Royal Academy; and he therefore resolved to organise his projected legion from the body of artists at large, without any special reference to the academic character. In this endeavour he was much more successful. He obtained, of course, a considerable number of recruits from among the ranks of the Academy, including a fair sprinkling of R. A.'s; and indeed it may be assumed that the great majority of young artists of any merit or pretensions, then practising in London, and who had not as yet attained academic honours, were connected with the institution in the character of students—the privileges of a student, once conferred, continuing in full force for the benefit of the individual admitted to their enjoyment, during a period of ten years. Whatever may have been the relative proportion of academic and non-academic volunteers, who were persuaded to enrol themselves in this patriotic band, their united forces soon formed a

body sufficiently numerous, in the opinion of the promoters of the project, to justify a communication to the government, containing a formal and unrestricted offer of their military services, and a request that they might be honoured by the royal sanction and authority necessary for their regular organisation as a volunteer corps.

A letter was therefore addressed in the joint names of Mr. Shee and some other artists of eminence, who had with him formed themselves into a committee for the furtherance of the project, to the minister* to whose department all matters relating to the volunteer armament were referred, soliciting an interview, for the purpose of submitting the details of the plan to the consideration of government. In due course the committee received a reply from his lordship, appointing an early day to receive them. Mr. Shee and some other members attended accordingly in Downing Street, at the appointed time, and were very politely received by the minister, who listened with marked attention to the explanatory statements submitted to him by the spokesman of the party, and asked a great number of questions bearing on the details of the project, and seeming to indicate a more than ordinary interest in the subject. He appeared, indeed, according to Sir Martin's report of the interview, to enter with great eagerness into the views of the deputation, and to anticipate, from the peculiar constitution of the projected corps, some

* This was, I believe, the principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. I am unable to recal with certainty the name of the Minister, — a Noble Lord, — with whom the interview took place; and having no written *data* to fix the exact period of the transaction, — the details of which I give on the authority of Sir Martin's own verbal narration, — I cannot take upon myself to supply the defect of my memory, on this point, by reference to official records.

extraordinary benefit to the public service, the exact nature of which was not very distinctly apprehended by the projectors themselves. Whatever may have been his grounds for attaching so much importance to a warlike movement, the circumstances of which did not involve any very portentous political signification, the impression left on the minds of Mr. Shee and his colleagues at the close of what appeared a highly satisfactory discussion, was that, if his lordship had attributed to every individual member, the same amount of talent and ferocity which distinguished those two illustrious practitioners in arts and arms, Salvator Rosa and Benvenuto Cellini, he could hardly have been more gratified by the prospect of enlisting the intellect and personal prowess of the proposed corps, in the cause of loyalty and national independence. The explanation which Sir Martin would occasionally suggest, when relating in after times the details of this official interview, was the existence of a slight degree of confusion in the ministerial mind on the subject of *military drawing*, encouraging a belief that the skill exhibited by these heroic professors of the graphic art, in tracing the "line of beauty," would qualify them for the performance of valuable services in the surveying and engineering departments of the volunteer force.

The deputation, however, did not, on that occasion, receive any distinct pledge that their proffered services would be accepted by the government, but were informed that his lordship would duly communicate their loyal and dutiful offer to the King, and apprise them, with as little delay as possible, of His Majesty's pleasure, and the decision of the proper constitutional authorities, on the subject. They retired from the interview in high spirits, and with the full conviction

that their patriotic design was on the eve of being carried into effect in the most satisfactory manner. Each returned home to meditate on strategical and regimental details, bent on combining the practical and the picturesque, in the cut and colour of a *coatee*, the form of a *shako*, and the judicious arrangement of sash, cross-belt, and sword-knot.

They were, however, doomed to disappointment. In a few days there came from the Home Office a polite communication to the gentlemen of the committee, conveying the thanks of the government for the offer of their services, but informing them that the number of volunteer corps already embodied was so great, as to render all further incorporation of regiments of the same class unnecessary and inexpedient.

Thus baffled in his wish to signalise his zeal for the defence of our national independence, by an exceptional and unconditional assumption of military duties, Mr. Shee was reduced to the necessity of restraining his patriotic ardour within such bounds of warlike enthusiasm, as the rules of the ordinary volunteer service prescribed. He accordingly joined the corps of Bloomsbury volunteers, in the character of a private. This distinguished brigade was chiefly composed of lawyers, and comprised some of the most eminent names at the bar, and in the lower ranks of the profession. Having regard to the prevalent professional character with which this gallant body was impressed, the reader will not be surprised to learn that it obtained and was very generally designated by the complimentary *sobriquet* of "*the Devil's Own.*"*

* There were, I believe, at that time, two regiments of Bloomsbury Volunteers. The one to which Mr. Shee was attached was, I think, under the command of that distinguished civilian, and most amiable man, Sir John Nicholl, then King's Advocate, and subsequently, during a long course of years, Judge of the Admiralty Court.

As a recruit in this learned corps, Mr. Shee was punctual at drill, and sedulous in his application to the study of regimental discipline. In due course of tuition, he was reported fit for the ranks. But notwithstanding the unusual amount of trouble which he had taken with a view of contributing his personal aid to the national defences, he was not destined to be called into active service. The regiment to which he was provisionally attached, had already, it would seem, more than its full complement of efficient rank and file. The supernumerary contingent, of which he formed a part, had never been called out even for a field day in Hyde Park or on Hampstead Heath, when the alarm created by the camp of Boulogne disappeared simultaneously with, or shortly after the departure of the formidable armament so long arrayed in menacing form and aspect, almost in sight of our shores; and although many, if not most, of the volunteer regiments remained embodied during several subsequent years, they mustered in reduced numbers, and were paraded for drill or inspection at very rare intervals.

This episodical *phasis* of warlike enthusiasm and excitement, having passed away from the social system in England, Mr. Shee, sharing the fate of many of his patriotic fellow-citizens who had been officially informed that it was not *their* "*cue to fight*," and had consequently relinquished, with regret or satisfaction, as the case might be, the unaccustomed paths of glory, for the quieter pursuits incidental to their normal condition, betook himself, with renewed energy, to those fields of intellectual contest where more peaceful and not less graceful laurels were to be won. He had long devoted a large portion of his leisure to the composition of a didactic poem on the theory and practice

of his art; and his original plan, varied and diversified, in its progress, through the influence of feelings and ideas suggested by the state of public criticism, taste, and patronage, had been gradually extended to the poetical discussion of many topics that were far from addressing themselves exclusively to the attention of the student, but were, on the contrary, more obviously referable to the functions of the patron, the pretensions of the critic, and the duties of the statesman, in relation to the fine arts.

Sincerely devoted to the cause of art, in the highest and noblest development of its powers,—zealous for its true interests, and keenly sensitive as to its social estimation,—he saw much to censure, more to regret, and not a little to ridicule in the apathetic disregard which its concerns encountered on the part of the state, and the ignorant and vulgar insensibility which vied with flippant and coxcombical pretence, throughout a large section of society, in the tendency to disparage the efforts and degrade the intellectual position of the artist. It was therefore but natural that satire and sarcasm should enter largely into his treatment of a subject, not easily dissociated, in his mind, from the consideration of the practical results attendant on those professional studies which, in his didactic character, he sought to direct. Thus, as he proceeded in his task, the earlier and introductory portion of the poem, probably far exceeding the limits which he had, in original contemplation, assigned to it, assumed a character, and exhibited a definite object, so far distinct from the general purpose of the author in undertaking the work, as to suggest the expediency of giving it to the public, in the first instance, in a separate and independent shape.

The great length to which the notes appended to this introductory part had extended,—containing, as they did, a considerable mass of dissertation, always animated in style, and often striking and original in thought and expression,—afforded an additional inducement to the adventurous author, to take the field with a preliminary and, in some sense, experimental volume, for which he thus found ample materials both in verse and prose, ready elaborated to his hands, before he could be said to have fully worked out the more practical and serious task of instruction, to which his labours were in theory directed.

The selection of a title is usually not the least important matter involved in a first literary appearance before the public; for although the exercise of a judicious choice, in this momentous concern, will go but a short way to recommend a book devoid of intrinsic merit or interest, to the favour of the intelligent reader, the repulsive influence of a common-place, absurd, or unmeaning designation will, I think, be at once admitted by every one who has, at any time, found himself engaged in calculating the probabilities of amusement or instruction, in reference to the unknown contents of a miscellaneous book-shelf, or a club-room table.

If, in launching this his first venture on the stormy sea of letters, Mr. Shee attached any weight to such considerations, or bestowed any reflection on this *titular*, but by no means merely *nominal* difficulty, candour will oblige us to acknowledge that his deliberations on the subject were attended with very indifferent success; and it is not easy to conceive that the exercise of any amount of ingenuity, seriously bent on repressing the ardour of literary curiosity, and brought to bear, in

that view, on the question of the proprieties or expediencies of the title-page, could have resulted in a less attractive description of the contents of a volume, than is supplied by the unpretending title of "Rhymes on Art, or the Remonstrance of a Painter."

There were, however, circumstances connected with the publication, or rather with the authorship of the poem, which served to counterbalance the effect of its very unattractive title. The author was well known both socially and professionally; and although he had not previously challenged the attention of the public by any acknowledged literary effort, his conspicuous mental powers and great conversational brilliancy could not but justify the most sanguine anticipations as to the capabilities of his pen, on the part of those who had met him in society.

That he could write otherwise than well and agreeably, on the subject of his art, was not to be imagined; nor did it seem unlikely that he might, by the graces of style and the flights of fancy, impart even to details of a technical character, a degree of interest to which the reader least skilled in the theory of art could hardly be insensible. Well founded as were the author's complaints of public apathy in matters of taste, there was still a considerable section of the most refined classes of society, to whom the fate of the arts in this country was not a subject of indifference, and who were at least prepared to approach the arena of literary controversy on their claims and merits, with that moderate amount of excited attention which the dramatic critics of France distinguish as an "*interêt de curiosité.*"

The announcement of a new poem, too, in connection with a well-known name, was more calculated to attract notice at the period in question, than it would be in our

day. The public wrote much less than it does at present; and if it did not actually read more, the reading portion of it, perhaps, read with more critical feeling and deliberate attention. There were great poets still extant, in all the social enjoyment of their fame,—bright and conspicuous stars in the literary firmament. Other and even more brilliant luminaries were just appearing above the horizon; nor had the readers of poetry, in their admiration of living genius, quite discarded all respect for the earlier glories of the muse in England. It was still in the vigorous and graceful strains of Dryden and Pope, and in the more recent productions of that classical school which adhered to the orthodox traditions inseparably connected with those immortal names, that the youthful votary of the Nine sought his standard of correct and harmonious versification; and though some years earlier, Southey had, at once, assailed the peace of the realm and outraged the prescriptive decencies of the king's *poetical* English, by the jacobinical barbarism of his dactylics and hexameters, these rhythmical atrocities, triumphantly encountered as they had been by the political and literary satire of Canning and Frere, in the sparkling pages of the "Anti-Jacobin," had done little towards undermining the loyalty, and been still less successful in corrupting the taste, of a generation that read and admired "the Rape of the Lock," and recked not of the audacious effusions of rhymeless and *rhythmless* doggrel, which, in submission to the decrees of the modern transatlantic Parnassus, their descendants are content to receive and applaud under the desecrated name of poetry.

The critical tribunal by which the claims of the aspiring bard were to be judged in those days, was, therefore, far different from that which now takes cog-

nisance of such matters, and far more favourable to the prospects of such a work as "Rhymes on Art," the poetical merits of which were characteristic of a school that may be almost described as obsolete; while the author's pungent and vigorous satire dwelt largely with social and political absurdities that have, in some measure, at least, happily passed away.

Whatever extrinsic circumstances may have contributed to its success, there is no doubt that "Rhymes on Art," notwithstanding the repulsive modesty and prophetic gloom* of the title page, and the limited nature of the interest which the technicality of the subject could command, was eminently and rapidly successful. The first edition, ushered into the world by an obscure publisher, bears the date of 1805; and the second edition, which made its appearance, accompanied by an additional preface, in which the favourable reception of the poem by the public is adverted to in a suitable tone of acknowledgment, issued, I think, from the press, in the course of the ensuing year, bearing at the foot of the title page the more auspicious name of "John Murray." It subsequently reached a third edition, under the same bibliopolic management.

The Edinburgh Review (No. 15), published in April, 1806, contained a friendly and not indiscriminating *critique* on "Rhymes on Art," which was the more gratifying to the author, as representing the unbiassed judgment of a tribunal of high critical repute, and, at that period, of almost proverbial severity. To be favourably reviewed by this formidable organ of opinion,

* The author took as his principal motto, a mutilated line from the first Satire of Persius:

"Quis leget hæc? . . . . Nemo, herculè, nemo!"

which in those days enjoyed an undisputed pre-eminence of jurisdiction, in the administration of literary justice,—its great competitor and rival, "The Quarterly," being not yet *in rerum naturâ*,—was nearly equivalent to a formal admission into the higher rank of authorship. It was in some sort to be made *free* of the Republic of Letters. It may therefore be taken as strong corroborative evidence of the impression produced on the mind of the reading public, half a century ago, by a work which, though now for many years out of print, and consequently almost wholly unknown to the present generation, was long recognised as conferring on its author a legitimate and honourable claim to the character of a poet.

The opening passages of the preface to the first edition, appear to me sufficiently just in their estimate, and striking in their description, of the moral responsibilities of authorship, to justify their insertion in this place.

"Few writers have the confidence to appear before the public for the first time, without attempting, in some degree, to excuse or account for their intrusion.

"'Why do you publish?' is a question always anticipated from the reader; and to answer or evade it is most commonly the business of the preface.

"To speak, indeed, with propriety, either from the press or the rostrum, requires qualifications from nature and education which, perhaps, it is some degree of arrogance to suppose we possess. He, therefore, who voluntarily presents himself in the character of an author,

"'Who dares ask public audience of mankind,' *

should be sensible that he gives a proof of confidence in his own powers, which both occasions and authorises an examination of

* Young.

them that no deprecatory introduction can, or ought to, prevent. If he will start from the crowd, jump on the literary pedestal, and put himself in the attitude of Apollo, he has no right to complain if his proportions are examined with rigour,—if comparisons are drawn to his disadvantage, or if, on being found glaringly defective, he is hooted down from a situation which he has so unnecessarily and injudiciously assumed. A conviction of this, perhaps, it is, which has so often occasioned young writers to assure the public with great eagerness, that they have come forward with reluctance, that they have been, as it were, thrust upon the stage, under all the embarrassment of conscious incapacity and anxious trepidation. In the hope of disarming censure by diffidence, and obviating the imputation of presumption, it became a kind of established etiquette for a virgin muse to bind up her blushes in an introductory *bouquet*, and present them to the reader as an offering of humility and conciliation.

"But the good sense of the present day has, in a great measure, exploded, as idle and impertinent, this species of literary prudery. Whatever a writer may profess, praise or profit will always be considered his real motive; and when he has once overcome his feelings so far as to venture upon the public stage, if his merits are only in proportion to his modesty, he will find that he has overrated his pretensions.

"An author should disdain to fight under false colours, or to owe his security to anything but his strength. His object is not to escape with impunity, but to acquit himself with credit; and it can neither provoke his fate, nor prejudice his reception, to avow honestly that he has more ambition than prudence; that he pants for distinction, and pursues it at the hazard of disgrace.

"His valour, surely, is not much to be respected, who cries out 'Quarter!' on coming into the field."—*Preface to* "Rhymes on Art," p. 1, *et seq.*

On the nature, scope, or details of the work in question it would not be consistent with the limits prescribed by my duties as a biographer, to expatiate

at great length. But I trust I shall not be considered as transgressing the bounds of reasonable discretion, if, while on the subject of a poem once so popular, and now nearly forgotten, or remembered merely in its singular and unattractive title, as connected with the traditional reputation of the author, I proceed to lay before the reader a few extracts, which may convey some idea of the peculiar merit which secured for it so considerable a share of public notice, at the time of its publication. As I have intimated, much of the satire contained in "Rhymes on Art" has become obsolete, being directed against social or political absurdities and heresies that, if not absolutely extinct, are no longer rampant, and prevail, if at all, to a much less offensive extent.

The caustic and indignant severity, with which the author lashes the false philosophy and revolutionary cant of the shallow disciples of the French Republican school, has, happily, but little application to the political follies of our day, in which anarchical schemes of government find but scanty favour with the public;—although the desolating doctrines of religious infidelity, with which, in the early part of the century, they were so intimately connected, are again taking root among us, insidiously tainting our scientific literature, and labouring to pervert our social legislation.

It can indeed no longer be said, with even a poetical amount of truth, of society in England, that

> "Their heads with straws from Rousseau's stubble crowned,
> Our metaphysic madmen rave around.
> With kings and priests they wage eternal war,
> And laws, as life's strait-waistcoats, they abhor."
>
> *Rhymes on Art*, part 2, line 50, *et seq.*

But it is to be feared that among the nations of con-

tinental Europe, there are, even now, but too many political and social theorists, whose insane speculations might be not inappropriately satirised in the following lines:—

"No more her ancient settled systems prized—
Lo! Europe, like a compound, analysed.
Her laws, modes, morals, melted down, to try
What forms the fighting elements supply;
What shapes of social order rise, refined,
From speculation's crucible combined.
While cool state chymists watch the boiling brim,
And Life's low dregs upon the surface swim.
What! though 'midst Passion's fiery tumults tossed,
A generation's in the process lost!
Regardless of his raw material—man—
The calm philosopher pursues his plan,—
Looks on the ruin of a race with scorn,
And works the weal of ages yet unborn."

Ibid. part 2, 143, *et seq.*

The position of the art and its professors, however, in reference to the antagonism to which they are ever exposed, from the coxcombs and pretenders who infest the regions of *virtù*,—although greatly ameliorated since the days of "Rhymes on Art," from the operation of a variety of social causes, in the creation or combination of which, Sir Martin had, himself, no inconsiderable share,—is still so far unchanged in its general aspect and character, as to render all explanatory comment superfluous in citing the following passages, in which, with a force and bitterness of satire not often surpassed, he indulges in a sarcastic *tirade* against the *dilettanti* of his day, the flavour and pungency of which will, I think, be found to have suffered but little evaporation from the lapse of time.

" Painting, dejected, views a vulgar band,
From every haunt of dulness in the land
In heathen homage to her shrine repair,
And immolate all living merit there!
From each cold clime of pride that glimmering lies,
Brain-bound and bleak, 'neath Affectation's skies,
In critic crowds new Vandal nations come,
And—worse than Goths—again disfigure Rome;
With rebel zeal each graphic realm invade,
And crush their country's arts by foreign aid.
Dolts from the ranks of useful service chas'd,
Pass muster in the lumber troop of Taste;
Soon learn to load with critic shot, and play
Their pop-guns on the genius of the day.—
No awkward heir that o'er Campania's plain,
Has scampered like a monkey in his chain,—
No ambush'd ass that, hid in learning's maze,
Kicks at desert, and crops wit's budding bays,—
No baby grown, that still his coral keeps,
And sucks the thumb of science till he sleeps,—
No mawkish son of sentiment, who strains
Soft sonnet drops from barley-water brains,—
No pointer of a paragraph,—no peer
That hangs a picture-pander at his ear,—
No smatterer of the *ciceroni* crew,
No pauper of the parish of *Virtù*,—
But starts, an Aristarchus, on the town,
To hunt, full cry, dejected merit down;
With sapient shrug assumes the critic's part,
And loud deplores the sad decline of art.

" The dunce no common calling will endure,
May thrive in taste, and ape the connoisseur.
No duties there, of sense or science, paid:—
Taste's a free port where every fool may trade;
A mart where quacks of every kind resort,
The bankrupt's refuge, and the blockhead's forte.
* * * * * * * * *

Few now the gen'rous spirit feel, or feign,
That prides to call forth genius, and sustain;
That flies, e'en Failure's drooping wing to raise,
To soothe with kindness, and console with praise.
No learn'd Mæcenas fans the muse's fires,
No Leo lives, no Medici inspires:
The patron is a name disown'd—disgrac'd;
A part exploded from the stage of Taste.
While fierce, from every broken craft supplied,
Pretenders, armed in panoply of pride,
'Gainst modern merit take the field, with scorn,
And bear down all in our dull æra born;
With bigot eyes adore, and beating hearts,
The time-worn relics of departed arts;
Gem, picture, coin, camēo, statue, bust,
The furbish'd fragments of defrauded rust,
All, worship all, with superstitious care,
But leave the living genius to despair.

"Dug from the tomb of taste-refining time,
Each form is exquisite, each block sublime.
Or good, or bad,—disfigur'd, or deprav'd,
All art is, at its resurrection, sav'd;
All crown'd with glory in the critic's heav'n,
Each merit magnified, each fault forgiven.
* * * * * * * * *
Seclude me, heaven! from every light of art,
Cloud every joy that painting can impart!
All love of Nature, sense of taste, confound,
And wrap me in Cimmerian gloom around;
But never more, in mercy, let me view
Timander's pictures—and Timander too:
'Tis past all human patience to endure,
At once the cabinet and connoisseur.
Behold! how pleas'd the conscious critic sneers,
While circling boobies shake their asses' ears,
Applaud his folly, and, to feed his pride,
Bray forth abuse on all the world beside.

Hear him, ye gods! harangue of schools and styles,
In pilfered scraps from Walpole and De Piles!
Direct the vain spectator's vacant gaze,
Drill his dull sense, and teach him where to praise;
Of every toy, some tale of wonder frame,
How this from heav'n, or Ottoboni came;
How that, long pendant on plebeian wall,
Or lumber'd in some filthy broker's stall,
Lay, lost to fame, till by his taste restor'd,
Behold the gem—shrin'd, curtain'd, and ador'd.
Hear him, ye powers of ridicule! deplore
The Arts extinguish'd, and the Muse, no more;
With shrug superior now, in feeling phrase,
Commiserate the darkness of our days;
Now loud against all living merit rage,
And in one sweeping censure—damn the age.

"Look round his walls—no modern masters there,
Display the patriot's zeal, or patron's care.
His Romish taste a century requires,
To sanctify the merit he admires;
His heart no love of living talent warms,
Painting must wear her antiquated charms;
In clouds of dust and varnish veil her face,
And plead her age, as passport to his grace.
To critic worship, time 's a sacred claim,
That stocks, with fools, the calendar of Fame.

"Shame on the man, whate'er his rank or state,
Scorn of the good, and scandal of the great,
Who callous, cold, with false fastidious eye,
The talents of his country can decry,—
Can see, unmoved, her struggling genius rise,
Repress the flight, and intercept the prize,
Profuse of fame to Art's past efforts roam,
And leave unhonoured, humble worth at home!
Nor less, in every liberal mind, debas'd,—
The servile tribe—the tadpole train of Taste,

Who crown each block, as Jove in jest decrees,
And skip and squat around such fops as these.
Wherever power, or pride, or wealth keep court,
Behold this fulsome, fawning race resort;
A motley group—a party-colour'd pack
Of knave and fool,—of quidnunc and of quack,—
Of critic sops insipid, cold, and vain,
Done in the drip of some poor painter's brain,
Dabblers in science—dealers in *virtù*,
And sycophants of every form and hue.
Low artists too,—a busy, babbling fry,
That frisk and wriggle in a great man's eye,
Feed on his smiles, and simp'ring by his side,
Catch the cold drops that flatt'ry thaws from Pride;
A cunning kind of fetch-and-carry fools,
The scum of taste that bubbles up in schools;
Save-alls of Art, that shed a glimmering ray,
And burn the snuffs their betters cast away;
As abject, crouching, void, and vile a train,
As wit can well deride, or worth disdain."

Part 2, lines 223—252, 328—346, 351—418.

To the name of Ottoboni, occurring above in the text, there is appended a note, which it may be not superfluous to insert for the benefit of those who are alike ignorant of the history of this eminent *dilettante*, and of the ingenious artifices,—the "pious frauds,"—of the picture-dealing craft.

"Ottoboni, a celebrated Italian cardinal, collector, and connoisseur. Such was the reputation of his taste, that for many years after his death, no picture was esteemed in the market of *virtù* that could not be traced to have been in his collection; or that was not, by some ingenious picture-dealing anecdote, connected in some way or other with his name. On the dissolution of the Jesuits, a late doctor of high renown in the annals of picture-dealing, expressed himself in the following terms

to an eminent artist now living: 'The dissolution of the Jesuits! Heavens! what an occurrence! What a bait for the connoisseurs! Oh! that I were young again! Sir, the only lucky event that happened, in my time, was the death of Cardinal Ottoboni; and I ran his name with success against the field for five-and-twenty years.'"

These unsparing onslaughts on the "vandalism of the day,"—as he himself elsewhere characterises the spirit that animated the numerous class of pretenders in art and criticism,—were not, as he well knew, unattended with worldly and professional risk. The truer and more legitimate the satire, the more certain it was to raise up against him a host of enemies, among those who smarted under the keenness of that lash, which took effect in each individual case, from the conscious deserts of the sufferer, rather than from the deliberate direction of the hand which administered the salutary discipline. It was in vain that, in a foot-note appended to the masterly sketch of a modern collector and *dilettante*, under the name of Timander, which I have reproduced for the reader's edification in the foregoing lengthened extract, the author made a formal and distinct disclaimer of all personality, the sincerity of which no one who knew him could for a moment call in question. Though it might be true that (to use his own words) "the features, indeed, like those of the celebrated Helen of Zeuxis, are all derived from nature, in various models; but the whole face is ideal, and intended to represent the species, not the individual,"—the family likeness that pervades the physiognomy, or as the French term it, the "*physiologie*," of the numerous class of pretenders, whom the author designed to unmask and expose, was sufficiently strong and striking, to render many among them as prompt

to claim the questionable distinction of having sat for the satirical portrait, as Sir Andrew Aguecheek is eager to identify himself with the "Foolish Knight" of Malvolio's soliloquy, when he ingenuously exclaims, "*That's me, I warrant you!*"

The castigation was never, in fact, forgotten or forgiven, by the various classes of delinquents to whose offences it was applicable. From that time forward, the *connoisseur* world, with a few distinguished exceptions among those who were proudly conscious that the author's satire was not, and could not be, directed against *them*, looked upon him with coldness and ill-disguised hostility; and although, from his effective exertions in the promotion of those schemes of public encouragement for the higher branches of the art, with which, when once started, their pretensions, as leaders in the circles of *virtù*, made it a matter of expediency to associate themselves,—these Pharisees of Taste were constrained to observe towards him an outward show of respect and deference, little in accordance with their real feelings, it is hardly too much to say that among these would-be patrons of art, he was more disliked and feared for his strenuous attempts to rouse them to a sense of the duties involved in their assumed position, than honoured or esteemed for the partial success with which those efforts had been attended.

Without venturing to aver that the formation of that society now so well known as the British Institution, was *solely* attributable to the vigorous arguments and remonstrances of the author of "Rhymes on Art," the biographer would do less than justice to the memory of Sir Martin, if he hesitated to assert his claim to the largest share of the credit due to those, whose influence

and exertions combined to produce a result so favourable to the interests of the arts in this country. That public attention had been forcibly drawn to the shortcomings of the *dilettanti* patrons of the picture-dealer and *discouragers* of the painter, by the brilliant satire and eloquent reasoning contained in the text and notes of the poem, is a fact too well established by contemporary testimony, to be capable of plausible denial, even on the part of those to whom the author's social and official eminence was a source of envy and malevolence during his life, and who are still but too prompt to assail and disparage his posthumous reputation. It is equally certain that the British Institution started into existence within two years of the publication of "Rhymes on Art," under the auspices of a committee, by the most active and energetic member of which, the late Sir Thomas Bernard, the author was frequently and eagerly consulted on the affairs of the new undertaking, and the most important public proceedings of those to whom its management was intrusted. In his evidence given before the Parliamentary Committee on the Fine Arts, in the year 1836, Sir Martin alludes openly to this circumstance, in terms which sufficiently indicate his conscientious and firm conviction, that the origin of the society in question was mainly traceable to his own exertions.

I cannot refrain from placing before the reader another extract from "Rhymes on Art," of a different character from those which I have already cited, and affording, as I conceive, satisfactory evidence of his powers in a higher class of poetical composition. The following passage is all the more appropriately selected for quotation in this biography, as it refers to the memory of that great ornament of the British school,

whose genius was, through life, the theme of Sir Martin's warmest and most enthusiastic admiration,—Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"But lo! where Reynolds lies, without a stone
To mark his grave, or make his relics known;
No pomps of death the pious eye engage,
No trophies testify a grateful age;
No sculptur'd lays of love memorial flow,
To indicate the hallow'd dust below:
But he, whose genius rais'd his country's name,
Refin'd her taste, and led her Arts to fame;
Whose powers unrivall'd, Envy's self disarmed,
Whose pen instructed, and whose pencil charm'd;
He, summon'd hence, submits to Nature's doom,
And sleeps unhonour'd in a nameless tomb.
Yet nobler trophies soothe his hovering shade,
Than e'er sepulchral pageantry display'd.
Genius, like Egypt's monarchs, timely wise,
Constructs his own memorial ere he dies;
Leaves his best image in his works enshrin'd,
And makes a mausoleum of mankind.
Hail, Star of Art! by whose instinctive ray
Our boreal lights were kindled into day;
Reynolds! where'er thy radiant spirit flies,
By seraphs welcom'd 'midst acclaiming skies;
Whether by friendship fondly led to rove,
With Learning's sons in some elysian grove,
Where moral Johnson, bright in all her beams,
To list'ning angels treats celestial themes;
Or join'd by him,—the sage whose reverend form
Was seen amidst the tumult of the storm,
High waving wisdom's sacred flag unfurled,
In awful warning to a frantic world,
Prophetic Burke!—thou share the patriot glow
To mark Britannia's bright career below,—
To see her time-built throne unshaken stand,
And law and order triumph through the land;

Whether on Titian's golden pinion borne,
Bath'd in the bloom of heaven's immortal morn,
Thou sunward take thy sympathetic flight,
To sport amidst the progeny of light;
Or rapt to thy lov'd Buonarotti's* car,
'Midst epic glories flaming from afar,
With him, in awful frenzy fired to rove
The regions of sublimity above,
Seize grandeur's form, astride the lightning's blast,
On death's dark verge, on danger's summit cast:—
Immortal spirit! Lo! her virgin lays,
The muse to thee an humble tribute pays;
A muse unknown, unequal to aspire,
A truant from the pencil to the lyre—
Alternate cool'd, and kindled to a blaze,
As fear, or fancy, whispers blame or praise:
Who, though she oft has marked, with moral aim,
The harpies hovering o'er the feast of fame;—
Has heard, in hollow sounds, with awe impressed,
The nightmare moanings of ambition's breast;—
Yet touch'd to rapture oft, her thrilling soul
Through all its chords, aspiring thoughts control;
And fondly musing o'er what time may crown,
She feeds wild hopes in visions of renown."

The general success of "Rhymes on Art" in the world of literature *par excellence*, may be judged of by the following extract from a letter written by the author to his aunt, Mrs. Dillon, of which a fragment only has been preserved, but which by the post mark appears to have been despatched on the 25th of April, 1807.

"Since my last, an occurrence of a flattering nature has occurred relative to 'Rhymes on Art.' I received an unexpected visit from Cumberland (author of the 'West Indian,' and cotemporary with Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, &c.), who

* Michael Angelo.

accompanied by Sir James Bland Burgess, a baronet of large fortune and a poet of high reputation, informed me they could no longer forbear soliciting the acquaintance of *the greatest English poet now living.* I will not, in short, attempt to describe the extravagance of their praise. Suffice it to say that they asserted I had infinitely *surpassed Pope,* and produced a work that no man living could write. . . . These praises, and many more, I find, they repeated in a large company of literary men some days afterwards, when it was agreed, *nem. con.*, that my poetry and my prose united the merits of *Pope* and *Young,* of *Johnson* and *Burke!* I fear you will suppose this all a joke; but, I assure you, I tell it in sober seriousness. I have had a still more solid proof that my 'Rhymes' are in some little estimation; for a bookseller has thought it worth his while, without seeing or being allowed to see the remainder*, to offer me five hundred pounds for it, three hundred down, and the remaining two at two subsequent payments. As it is not yet, however, ready for the press, and I have not made up my mind whether I should sell it outright, or reserve an interest in the copy [right]; we have come to no conclusion on the subject."

Ultimately, he agreed with Mr. Miller, of Albemarle Street, at that time a publisher in extensive business, (and who was no doubt the bookseller alluded to in the foregoing extract,) for the sale to him of the absolute copyright of the forthcoming work, together with the remaining copies, and the copyright of "Rhymes on Art," for the sum of 600*l.*

Before taking leave of "Rhymes on Art," I am tempted to insert here a letter addressed to the author on the subject of that work, by one of the most distinguished and respected of his literary contemporaries; not merely because it affords corroborative evidence in support of what I have stated, as to the success of the

* That is, the remaining portion of the work, subsequently published under the title of "Elements of Art."

poem, but also as possessing some amount of intrinsic interest, in connection with the honoured name which is subscribed to the communication.

Of complimentary epistles, written in acknowledgment of presentation copies of a new work, little account can be taken, in estimating and duly appreciating the sincerity of the encomiums of which it may have been the object. The vanity and self-love, so proverbially charged against authors, must indeed exhibit themselves in a high state of development, where civil and courteous phraseology, often unwillingly extorted from the writer, after a painful struggle between his good nature and his candour, is accepted at its full nominal or verbal value, and passes current with the self-complacent victim of this common and almost inevitable hypocrisy, for the sterling language of heart-felt admiration.

The author of "Rhymes on Art" was of an intellectual temperament little exposed to the influence of such a pleasing delusion. He had himself no tendency to over-rate the depth or sincerity of those flattering opinions, which poured in upon him from various quarters where the functions of the critic might, in some degree, be warped by the partiality of the friend, or the instinctive civility of the courtier. Nor can his biographer think it material to record the eulogistic phrases in which the work was noticed by many eminent men,—such as Sharon Turner, and the elder Disraeli,—who could hardly be supposed to escape the bias of private friendship, in their favourable judgment of an author for whom they entertained so warm a personal regard, or by others who, like the accomplished and vigorous translator of Juvenal, had unexpectedly found in the poem itself, a graceful and well-merited

recognition of their own intellectual pre-eminence. But the unsought and spontaneous homage to the author's literary merits, volunteered by such a man as William Roscoe, with whom he had, up to that period, no personal acquaintance, must, at the time, have been a source of gratification to the author, and may, even now, be adverted to with legitimate satisfaction, by those who take an interest in his posthumous fame.

"SIR,

"It was not till after the publication of the Second Edition, that I had the pleasure of perusing your very interesting and spirited work, which you have so modestly entitled *Rhymes on Art;* by which you have demonstrated your right as a poet to the same distinguished rank which you had already attained as a painter. The neglect of the higher branches of the art in this country, where almost everything is referred to an immediate, sordid, and short-sighted profit, has long been a just cause of regret; but it was the task of an artist only to place this subject in its proper light, and if not to remedy the disgrace, at least to show where it ought to lie.

"In a late publication, I have had occasion to touch upon a part of your subject: the exclusion, in protestant countries, of picturesque representations, from places of public worship. The similarity of ideas which I have had the pleasure to observe between two writers, who had not seen each other's productions, has encouraged me to hope that you will do me the honour of accepting a copy of the Second Edition of the 'Life of Leo the Tenth,' which is now on the point of being published, and which I have directed to be sent to you as soon as it can be made up into volumes.

"In taking this liberty, I find an additional motive in the desire which I feel to convince you that, however I may have been led by the nature of my subject, or my partiality to literature and art, to commend their patrons and promoters, I fully concur in your sentiment, that there are objects of still greater importance; and that the highest acquirements in these depart-

ments would be ill attained by the sacrifice of those principles of independence, and that national spirit, which are the only true foundation of all permanent excellence.

"Allow me to subscribe myself, with most sincere esteem,

"Sir,

"Your very faithful and obedient servant,

"W. ROSCOE.

"Allerton, near Liverpool,
"16th October, 1806."

"Rhymes on Art" reached, as we have seen, a third edition. But, except in so far as the value of the copyright &c., was included in the arrangements with Mr. Miller, for the publication of the remaining portions of the poem, the pecuniary benefit derived by the author from this successful effort of his muse, bore but a very moderate proportion to the amount of reputation which it may be said to have earned for him. On settling accounts with Mr. Murray, who had taken upon himself the risk of this first adventure, on the not unusual condition of an equal division of profits with the author, the balance to Mr. Shee's credit, in respect of his share of the profits realised by the three editions, proved, to be a sum of between 16*l.* and 17*l.* If, however, the size and moderate price of the book, a small thin volume, — are taken into consideration, this result, in the case of a first work, will not appear extraordinary to those who have any experience of the hazards and mysteries of publication.

Nearly four years elapsed between the first appearance of "Rhymes on Art," and the publication of the remaining portion of the poem, which did not issue from the press until the year 1809.

When it is remembered that the work was elaborated in the rare intervals of leisure allowed by the constant

practice of a laborious profession, and that the subject demanded from the author a degree of scientific and practical accuracy in precept, illustration, and description, unattainable without a great amount of study and research, exclusively devoted to the various topics which the plan of the poem, in the progress of its development, naturally suggested, the delay will not be matter of surprise.

The notes themselves, which certainly bear, as in "Rhymes on Art" a very unusual disproportion to the text, contain a great mass of professional information and discriminating criticism, sufficiently attesting the depth and earnestness of thought, as well as the persevering energy of investigation, bestowed by the author on his task. They form, in fact, a series of essays on a variety of subjects connected with the theory and practice of art, interspersed, indeed, with a good deal of disquisition of a less technical character, but in the main, steadily directed to the avowed purpose of the work, viz. the instruction and guidance of the youthful votary of painting.

This subordinate portion of his literary labours may, therefore, well have engrossed a large share of the limited time and attention, which the author could devote to studies and pursuits not essentially involved in the practice of his profession. On the other hand, the task of clothing in harmonious verse, and adorning by poetic imagery and illustration, the subtle canons of taste, and the austere precepts of academical experience, is one that the fervid fancy and glowing numbers of the most accomplished bard, would be unable to achieve, without an intimate knowledge of the art, a familiar acquaintance with its history, and a nice discrimination of its uses, limits, and appropriate functions,—such as

protracted study can alone attain, and deep thought, aided by judicious observation, can alone effectually develop.

A production of this class, however rich in poetic beauties, could hardly be expected to attain that extended popularity, which an equal amount of literary merit, exhibited in reference to some subject of greater general interest, might perhaps have achieved. But though, to the trifler and smatterer in art, the more serious aspect of the work might be fraught with a certain degree of *repulsion*, the less superficial votary of taste, and the more thoughtful among unprofessional readers, found the task of perusal repaid by the brilliant fancy and spirited versification of the text, and by the judicious criticism, and bold originality of thought, displayed in the notes.

It must, however, be conceded that scientific knowledge, brought to bear upon pursuits in which a large proportion of the strictly technical element is necessarily involved, is most satisfactorily communicated in the humble language of prose. Verse, the more ambitious and elaborate vehicle of thought, cannot well dispense with extraneous ornament, in dealing with practical subjects, except at the risk of much that constitutes the charm, if not the very essence of poetry ; while, on the other hand, the didactic precision essential to the utility of the precept, is often attainable only by the sacrifice of those graces of diction and flowers of fancy, without which, poetic numbers, however skilfully constructed, must sink to the dull level of versified prose, and approach alarmingly near to the confines of doggrel.

If the sentiment expressed by Du Fresnoy in a line

which the author affixed to the first canto of "Elements of Art,"

"Ornari præcepta negent, contenta doceri,"

could be accepted as accurately describing the appropriate functions of didactic verse, the range of that species of composition could certainly never extend to the elevated regions of poetry: and the bard who starts with an emphatic disclaimer of all poetical pretensions, and abjures at the outset his supposed Parnassian allegiance,—

"Non mihi Pieridum Chorus hic, nec Apollo vocandus,"

has no right to complain if the public take him at his word, and fear to encounter the dry tuition of the professor, where they fondly hoped to find the glowing imagery of the poet.

This is not the place to discuss, at any length, the plan or details of the work, its merits of design or execution. But I cannot refrain from placing before the reader a few short extracts from the poem, by which he will be enabled, in some degree, to judge, how far the author has redeemed the promise, or, I should rather say, realised the hope held out in the following passage of his opening :—

"Yet may the muse, though still her course she trace,
In technic trammels and didactic pace,
Collect some flow'rets as she plods along,
Should Taste propitious smile upon the song."

While pointing out the insufficiency of industry, however laborious, and studies, however well directed, to supply the defect of natural genius in a painter,

he thus happily illustrates the nature of the advantages to be derived from judicious precept :—

> " Poets and painters, privileged heirs of fame,
> By right of birth alone their laurels claim.
> The Nine, repulsive, plodding toil refuse,
> And each dull son of system vainly sues.
> The star of Genius must the light impart
> That leads us to the promised land of Art.
> Yet though no maxims teach the muse's lore,
> No charts conduct us on the graphic shore,—
> The voice of precept claims prescriptive force,
> And rules, like beacons, warn us on our course.
> When neither lightly held, nor prized too high,
> Rules may assist the strength they can't supply ;
> The fountain copious feeds the stream below,
> But artful channels teach it how to flow,
> Collect the wandering waters as they glide,
> And turn to use the regulated tide."—Canto i.

The following animated description of the celebrated ancient Statue of Apollo, known as the Apollo Belvedere, will be recognised as correct and discriminative, even by those to whom that great work is known only through the agency of copies or casts. It need hardly be said that the enthusiasm which glows in every line of the poet's sketch, was not kindled by these secondary means, but inspired and sustained by careful observation and vivid recollection of the original marble, which formed one of the principal attractions of the Louvre, at the time of his visit to Paris, in the autumn of 1802. The name of the sculptor, to whose genius we are indebted for this unrivalled production of the chisel, has not been handed down, even by conjectural tradition, to our times; although the work in question

is justly looked upon as one of the most glorious triumphs of the art.

" But see, where Taste extends her brightest crown,
Unclaim'd amid the contests of renown!
Lost in the darkest night of time, his name,
By envious fate defrauded of his fame,
The hand divine, to whose high powers we owe,
The noblest image of a god below.

" Bright as on Pindus, crown'd by all the Nine,
Behold Apollo! Pythian victor, shine!
With holy zeal, in Delphic splendour placed,
And still revered, an oracle of taste!
He owns full tribute to his godhead given,
And finds on earth the homage feign'd in heaven.
Not with more awful grace, as sung of yore,
The god himself his golden quiver bore,
When o'er the Grecian host, in shafts of fire,
He pour'd swift vengeance at his priest's desire.
Erect his mien, with ease the silver bow
Has just let fly its terrors on the foe;
While, with triumphant step and eager eye,
He forward moves to see the monster die.
Majestic rising from its ample base,
The polish'd neck, uniting strength and grace,
Bears the bright head aloft, and seems to shine
The column of a capital divine!
In each light limb, elastic vigour proves
A power immortal, and in marble moves;
A form divine, to Heav'n's proportions just,
In grandeur graceful, as in grace august.
By Taste restored, on some celestial plan,
Drawn from the great original of man:
A cast recover'd of that mould divine,
That stamp'd Heaven's image strong in every line;
When first, as earth received him and revered,
The paragon of animals appear'd!

Great shade of genius, still decreed to raise
Our pride and wonder, yet elude our praise!
* * * * * *

"Say, dost thou, pleased, from Heaven's immortal bowers,
Behold on earth the triumph of thy powers?
Thy toil enshrined in glory's temple view,
Through every age, the idol of *virtù?*
How oft, as o'er the waste of ages cast,
The light of learning seem'd to show the past!
Has pious zeal, exploring, sought to raise
Thy reverend image to our mental gaze;
To rescue from oblivion's tide thy name,
And stamp it radiant on the rolls of fame.
But vain the search,—thou like a god dost shine,
On earth unknown, but in thy work divine."

Canto ii. line 223, *et seq.*

The second canto closes with an apostrophe to the Spirit of Ancient Greece, which is not too long for insertion, and affords a fair specimen of the Author's general manner.

"Hail! awful shade! that o'er the mould'ring urn,
Of thy departed greatness lov'st to mourn:
Deploring deep the waste, where once unfurl'd
Thy ensigns glitter'd o'er a wond'ring world.
Spirit of ancient Greece! whose form sublime,
Gigantic striding, walks the waves of time;
Whose voice from out the tomb of ages came,
And fired mankind to freedom and to fame:
Beneath thy sway how life's pure flame aspired,
How genius kindled, and how glory fired!
How taste, refining sense, exalting soul,
Enfranchised mind from passion's coarse control!
Aroused to deeds, by heav'n and earth revered,
While all the majesty of man appeared.
How vast our debt to thee, immortal power!
Our widow'd world subsists but on thy dower:

Like Caria's queen, our relict ages raise
But monumental trophies to thy praise!
Lo! from the ashes of thy arts arise,
Those Phœnix-fires that glitter in our skies.
Thy sun, long set, still lends a twilight ray,
That cheers our colder clime and darker day,
Exhales high feelings from our glowing hearts,
Inflames our genius and refines our arts:
Still at thy shrine the hero's vows aspire,
The patriot kindles there his purest fire;
Thy virtues still applauding ages crown,
And rest on thy foundations their renown!
Beneath the mighty ruins of thy name,
We build our humble edifice of fame,
Collect each shatter'd part, each shining stone,
Of thy magnificence, by time o'erthrown,
Arrange the rich materials, rapt, amazed,
And wonder at the palace we have raised."

Canto ii. *ad fin.*

The following short description of the functions and effect of perspective appears to me to exhibit much graphic force and precision.

"Perspective next demands the student's care,
And, queen of distance, reigns unrivall'd there,—
Confides the compass to his hand, and leads
The doubtful pencil as the draught proceeds.
Behold! enlarging in her magic line,
The opening vista spreads—a vast design!
The plain expands—the pillar, by her aid,
Proportion'd, lessens in the long arcade;
Behold! how part from part receding flies,
As different groups in just gradation rise;
While, taught by rule, each figure finds its place,
And miles seem measured in an inch of space."

Canto ii. line 47, *et seq.*

"Elements of Art" appears to have met with its fi share of notice from the contemporary dispensers

critical justice or severity. Their verdict was in general favourable. It met indeed with great approbation from that "audience fit tho' few," to whose higher intelligence and more refined powers of criticism, it was chiefly addressed. But there is no doubt that it failed to obtain the same amount of favourable notice from the reading public at large, which had been bestowed on its predecessor; a result for which it is easy to account. The caustic satire which had given pungency to many of the most striking passages in "Rhymes on Art," if not wholly excluded from the composition of "Elements," was at least more sparingly indulged, and, when resorted to, chiefly confined to the notes; the strictly didactic plan and spirit of the text, affording little scope for the appropriate display of the author's powers of sarcasm.

The whole tone of the poem is necessarily of a graver and deeper character, as appealing more particularly to the mind and sympathies of the student, whom it seeks to stimulate, by the highest motives of ambition, to an energetic pursuit of excellence, while it studies to control and direct his ardour, by the soundest principles of taste, nature, and truth.

CHAPTER VIII.

1809—1814.

Records of the Painting-room. — Occasional Deviations from the Line of Portraiture. — "Lavinia." — "Belisarius."—"Prospero and Miranda." — Candid and Uncomplimentary Criticism. — The Literary Society. — The Eumelian Club. — Hibernian susceptibility. — The fractional part of an Insult. — Origin of the "Alfred." — Sir Thomas Bernard. — Rapid Success of the Project. — Rise, Decline, and Fall of the "Alfred." —Thomas Moore. — "Anastasius" Hope. — Academic Details. — Holland House. — Henry Grattan. — The Veto.—The elder D'Israeli.—Literary Details.

THE details of Mr. Shee's literary career which I have recorded in the preceding chapter, comprise the most important incidents of his life, during a very considerable lapse of time. I shall pass rapidly over the few years which intervened between the publication of "Elements of Art," and the appearance of the work which closed his poetical labours on subjects connected with the theory and practice of his art, viz.: "The Commemoration of Reynolds." The occurrences of those and indeed of many subsequent years, afford, in his case, but scanty materials for biography, although they were years of active and successful professional exertion, occasionally diversified by academic duties, which ever claimed a large share of his anxious and most conscientious attention.

However engrossing or exciting the labours of the *studio*, or the animated and sometimes, perhaps, stormy debates of the council or the general assembly, may have

proved at the time to himself, their details, even if accurately ascertainable, would possess but little interest for the general reader. The enumeration of persons more or less distinguished in station, character, or talent, who, during a period of many busy years, gave occupation to the artist's pencil, or figured under his auspices upon the walls of the Somerset House Exhibition, would be ill calculated to repay curiosity or challenge attention; and it forms no part of the task which I have imposed on myself as his biographer, to enter on a critical discussion of his merits as a painter, or to trace the progress of those administrative exertions, to the energy and usefulness of which he was, in great measure, indebted for the important influence he exercised over the councils of the Royal Academy, long before his election as their official head, and indeed long before the presidency of his immediate predecessor in the academic chair.

His constant occupation, as a portrait painter, during the period to which I am now referring, left him but little leisure for the exercise of his talent, or the indulgence of his fancy, in any more generally interesting department of the art; but at intervals he produced and exhibited some works of a poetical character, that were not considered to impair the reputation which he had earned in the more practical and profitable line of portraiture. Of these the most worthy of note were, perhaps, his "Lavinia," from "Thomson's Seasons," "Belisarius,"—a picture substituted by him for the work originally presented to the Academy on receiving his diploma of R.A., which had sustained some accidental injury, or exhibited some alarming symptoms of premature decay, after it was deposited at Somerset

House,—and a picture of a peasant girl in a woody landscape, a work of a similar character to "Lavinia," which was purchased by the late Duke of Sutherland, then Marquis of Stafford, and is now, if I mistake not, in the collection of the present duke at Trentham.

The most ambitious effort of his pencil, in the poetical or dramatic line, after his election into the ranks of the academicians, was a very large group of "Prospero and Miranda," from the "Tempest," in which the figures, although not of what is called "heroic" size, were of stature suitable to their dramatic dignity. The moment selected by the painter was that in which the princely magician of the enchanted isle is, if not "riding on the whirlwind," at least "directing the storm" with very effective authority; while his fair daughter, clinging to him as he supports her with one arm, bears ample testimony, by her expression and attitude of terror, to the intensity of the elemental strife that rages around them. A stormy sea and sky were among the indispensable accessories of such a composition, which was, consequently and not inappropriately, of a rather sombre hue and character, though enlivened by a face of great beauty, and a figure of bright aspect, in the person of the fair Miranda.

This elaborate and certainly rather striking work, when exhibited early in the century, occupied a conspicuous position in the great room of the academy, and was, in the solemnity of its character, and the unusual amount of its superficial extension, fully kept in countenance by a still more ambitious production from the pencil of Mr. Lawrence, who, in the same exhibition, assailed the nerves and evoked the sublimest poetical reminiscences of the spectator, by his celebrated

and colossal picture of "Satan calling up his Legions," as described by Milton.

"Awake, arise; or be for ever fallen!"

What extent of favourable notice was bestowed by the enlightened *dilettanti* of the period on these spirited attempts of two popular portrait painters, to deviate into the higher regions of the art, I am unable to say; but if the success of the venture may be estimated by the terms of a criticism addressed to Mr. Shee on the day of the private view,—by an unconscious and perfectly sincere dispenser of that salutary discipline, which is to be extracted from the knowledge of what can be said or thought in our dispraise,—it must be admitted that they had no great reason to congratulate themselves on the result of their labours, so far as the taste of the public at large was concerned.

On the occasion to which I refer, Mr. Shee encountered an elderly gentleman of his acquaintance, who was scanning the pictorial display on the walls, in all directions, with a look of uneasy and dissatisfied bewilderment. In answer to a question addressed to him by Mr. Shee, as to his opinion of the general effect of the exhibition, he replied: "Why, sir, it is well enough in its way; but I cannot imagine, sir, what possesses the artists to send such large ugly things to the exhibition. Now, there, for instance," continued he, pointing up with his cane to Prospero and Miranda, "*there's* a *great ugly thing*, sir; and there again, sir," turning round, and with equal disgust directing his cane towards Satan, "*there's another great ugly thing.* What can the painters mean by it?" The unlucky artist, less mortified by the severity of the remark, than amused at the *naïveté* which had led his critical

friend to select one of the chief delinquents, as the depositary of his uncomplimentary opinions on the most conspicuous objects in the exhibition, assented, with well-assumed gravity, to the sweeping and generalised condemnation of the offending works; observing that the infatuation of the perpetrators was really unaccountable, and greatly to be deplored!

The fate of these two pictures was in some respects similar; as each remained in the possession of the painter to his dying day, and formed a conspicuous object in his gallery.. Neither of them was, in fact, very *marketable*, either in size or subject. Works of such vast superficial extent, not appealing in any way to the religious, political, or patriotic feelings of any class of the community, might be viewed with approval in a miscellaneous exhibition, but were little likely to be coveted for the adornment of private dwellings, or edifices of a public character.

It has indeed been ingeniously suggested by an irreverent joker, that "*Satan calling up his Legions*" would be placed, with great symbolical effect and much historic propriety, in the noble lecture room of the "*Incorporated Law Society;*" but the worthy council of that highly useful institution would probably demur to the peculiar illustration of the theory of "*couleur locale*" which such a proposal involves; nor would the suggestion of the same profane wit, that the representation of Prospero in the art of effectually "*raising the wind*" might form a significant and appropriate decoration for the walls of the *Stock Exchange*, be likely to meet with more favourable attention on the part of the governing body of the last-mentioned establishment.

The social and domestic life of Mr. Shee during the

period to which I must now revert, is not much more fruitful in incidents of importance, than his professional and literary career. His habits of studious application, and his heartfelt appreciation of the blessings of a happy home, encouraged and fostered in him a taste for retirement, which, however respectable and even praiseworthy in itself, was sometimes indulged, in his case, to an extent not quite consistent with worldly prudence or professional wisdom. Still, the attention excited by his poetical works, in conjunction with his artistic eminence, placed him in too conspicuous a social light, to admit of his withdrawing himself altogether from the busy and brilliant throng which is more emphatically called "the world," in which his distinguished manners, general information, and rare conversational powers, ever secured him a welcome reception.

Though, as far as his own inclination went, by no means what Dr. Johnson would have called a "*clubbable*" man,—it was his fate, within a very short space of time, to be pressed into the ranks of not a few of those convivial associations, which may be said to constitute a peculiar phase of English society, and which certainly tend to keep up its intellectual vigour in various departments of mental exertion. I am not now speaking of clubs, in the more generally received sense of the term, as it is understood at the present day,—implying, as it does, a large body of individuals, jointly and severally entitled to the benefit of a spacious and luxuriantly furnished mansion, of palatial aspect and dimensions, and associated together, not so much on the footing of convivial or intellectual intercourse, as for the purpose of individually enjoying, at a very moderate rate of expense, and without any personal trouble or responsibility, the conveniences and luxuries of a costly and well-ordered

establishment. Such clubs were, in the early years of this century, almost unknown, except in the instances of White's, Brookes's, and, I believe, I ought to add, Boodle's;—institutions, far more political than social, in their general character, and whose convivialities, doubtless carried on according to a very liberal scale of symposial indulgence, were diversified and fostered by the practice and attraction of high play, which sometimes prevailed to a fearful extent in these *réunions*, at a period when the most brilliant orators and accomplished statesmen of the day, so far from compromising their political or personal dignity, might be almost said to enhance their power and popularity, by exhibiting themselves in the light of habitual drunkards and gamblers.

In the year 1808, indeed, a very remarkable impulse and a new direction, of a more expansive character, was given to that spirit which tends to develop itself in the formation of these gregarious confraternities, by the establishment of the "Alfred,"—a club of whose origin I shall presently have something to say,—Mr. Shee having been one of its original members. But I am now referring to social combinations of a different class, to which the term *club* is equally, and, indeed, by a more ancient prescription, correctly applicable. The societies in question were chiefly, if not exclusively, convivial associations, having no permanent local habitation, or peculiar domestic establishment; the members of which were in the habit of meeting periodically, at some well-known and well-conducted tavern of high repute,—such as the Thatched House in St. James's Street,—and dining together for the sole purpose of enjoying each other's society and conversation.

This class of clubs, which were, at the period here referred to, and still are, very numerous among the intellectual and scientific sections of London society,

are probably all, or nearly all, traceable to the example, and have been mostly formed in emulation, of that illustrious band of philosophers, authors, and wits, to whose convivial meetings, the faithful and minute pen of Boswell has given perennial fame and an undying interest—an institution associated, in the mind of every lover of English literature, with the revered names of Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, and Reynolds, and which may truly be said to be historically identified, in a great degree, with the records of their genius, and the splendour of their renown.

It may not, perhaps, be wholly superfluous to mention that, according to received traditional belief, this distinguished society has never been suffered to fall into abeyance. The lists of its members, and the periodical recurrence of its meetings, have been kept up in unbroken and uninterrupted succession. It still exists, I believe, in much of its pristine vigour and *éclat*, numbering among its members some of the brightest stars of the social and intellectual firmament of London, and proudly asserting its exclusive title to the designation of "The Club," *par excellence.*

Among the societies of this class, which flourished at the period of Mr. Shee's early successes in literature, and in the ranks of which he was duly enrolled, under very gratifying circumstances, the "Literary" and the "Eumelian" both held a distinguished position, and presented, in their convivial meetings, all the *agrémens* of that easy, yet polished and refined tone of social intercourse, which naturally results from the judicious combination of the literary and scientific, with the political and aristocratic elements of London life.

The "Literary Society" was, I believe, a kind of offshoot from "The Club"—and, if I mistake not, some

attempts were occasionally made by certain of its members who were fanatically devoted to its honour and reputation, to claim, on its behalf, the distinction of complete identity with the great Johnsonian confraternity. Perfectly analogous in character, object, and *matériel*,—holding their meetings in the same house,—and each tracing, or affecting to trace, its descent from the great parent stock, with at least a specious amount of evidence,—the two societies had so many points of resemblance, and so few distinctive peculiarities, *inter se*,—that their rival claims to be considered the genuine *côterie* of "the Mitre," afforded some legitimate grounds for ingenious controversy. The point could not, indeed, be decided upon the principle suggested by Molière's *Sosie*,—

"Le véritable Amphitryon —
C'est l'Amphitryon où l'on dine."

for both societies kept up that laudable practice at the Thatched House, in a style that could do no discredit to the ancestral memories with which they each sought to identify their own existence. But however plausible may have been the arguments brought forward in support of the claim of the Literary Society, it is certain that the balance of social tradition is greatly in favour of "the Club,"—and, indeed, the undisputed possession and exclusive enjoyment of the name,—which, in its dignified simplicity, asserts its superior pretensions, disdaining all descriptive or distinctive aid, to be derived from the questionable services of an adjective unemployed by the original *socii* in designating their community,—or, at least unrecorded by their faithful chronicler, Boswell,—may be considered as affording strong presumptive evidence in favour of the authentic character of their claim.

But however *schismatical* in its origin the Literary Society may have been, its practice was in strict accordance with the most orthodox views of social and intellectual enjoyment; and admission into its ranks was eagerly sought after by many whose talents and position were calculated to adorn and dignify its meetings. It is, I believe, still in existence, flourishing in undiminished credit and esteem.

The Eumelian Club, although now long since defunct, was, at the period of Mr. Shee's election into the society, in very high estimation: and it was not a little flattering to him, that he was chosen to supply the vacancy caused in its ranks by the death of one of the most distinguished ornaments of the British senate, who was equally remarkable for the brilliant qualities of social life,—viz., the Right Honourable William Windham.

The singular name selected by the founders of the club, was highly calculated to puzzle the unlearned, and might indeed occasion some slight degree of etymological bewilderment even to the scholar, until he was apprised of the fact, that the association had its origin in the desire to perpetuate the memory of the scientific attainments and social qualities of the celebrated *Dr. Ash*;—an explanation which imparts, no doubt, a slight shade of meaning to a very eccentric instance of the caprices of nomenclature, but scarcely suffices to excuse a silly and pedantic play upon words, quite worthy to have been suggested by some jocular and classical demon to one of the learned heroes of the "Dunciad." Figaro, in Beaumarchais' inimitable comedy of the "Barbier de Séville," exhibits a just appreciation of, and suggests the most reasonable excuse for, the inanities of that school of lyrical dramatic literature, which flourishes in the *libretti* of the opera, by observing that; "*Ce qui ne vaut*

pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante." It would seem that, on a similar principle, a conceit that would be looked upon as intolerable in English, may pass muster in the eyes of grave scholars and eminent *literati*, if its *no-meaning* can be clothed in a pseudo-classical garb, and its absurdity filtered through a semi-Hellenic medium.

As might have been foreseen, the name of this *well-ashed* body did not wholly escape the fate which so obvious and tempting a *pun-trap* seems almost irresistibly to invite; and while, on the one hand, it was jocularly remarked that, by reason of its varied and miscellaneous character, the Eumelian Club had indeed earned the praise of a *well-hashed* society, it was facetiously suggested on the other, that the *well-ashed* fraternity in question ought rather to be *well-birched* for their ridiculous affectation.

But in spite of its rather unfortunate name, the Eumelian Club, as I have said, held its own in the front rank of these convivial societies, and during many years enjoyed a high degree of consideration; nor was there any *réunion* of a similar character more famed for the agreeable and brilliant conversation which marked its periodical meetings. Like all institutions of the kind, which are restricted in point of numbers, and can exhibit a long list of patiently-expectant candidates for admission, it was occasionally seized with fits of exclusiveness; and in reference to one of these periodical manifestations of the *black-balling mania*, Sir Martin used to relate an anecdote highly characteristic of those pugnacious propensities, which his countrymen of the sister island were, until within a few years, in the habit of displaying with more of chivalry than of discretion.

There was, among the most popular and agreeable

members of the club, a Mr. O'H——, a gentleman of high position and large fortune, the representative in Parliament of an Irish county. Long past the middle period of life, he exhibited in his manners that bland and dignified courtesy which so well became his advancing years, his knightly descent, and the well-known benevolence of his disposition.

It chanced that on one evening, when there was a ballot to fill up some vacancies in the club, Mr. Shee was seated near Mr. O'H——, and engaged in quiet conversation with him on the topics of the day, while the exclusionists, who had, at previous meetings, been dealing rather liberally in black balls, excited the annoyance of the proposing and seconding parties, by a repetition of the same system in more than one instance. At length the balloting-box went round on the proposed election of a very distinguished and popular member of the House of Commons, who, although one of the active supporters of the Whig party in Parliament, enjoyed so much of the esteem and regard of men of all shades of opinion, in private life, that it seemed difficult to select a more unexceptionable candidate for admission into a club which did not profess to assume any distinct political character.

On opening the ballot, however, the fatal number of black balls appeared recorded against his name; and his proposer, annoyed and mortified at the result, could not refrain from expressing his vexation, and venturing on a few words of remonstrance. "Really, gentlemen," said Mr. F——, "this is most extraordinary. I must say, that if we go on, night after night, black-balling men of the character and position of Mr. ——, it will be quite a disgrace to the club."

No remark was made by Mr. O'H—— on any one pre-

sent, in condemnation of this little ebullition of petulance, not unnatural, perhaps, under the circumstances; conversation was resumed, and the evening passed off without anything occurring to disturb the general hilarity.

The next morning, while Mr. F——, the member who had been so much annoyed by the rejection of his candidate, was at breakfast, a card was brought to him by his servant, bearing the name of a gentleman with whom he was not acquainted, who, he was informed, requested to see him immediately on very urgent business.

The stranger was accordingly ushered into the room, and proved to be an individual of military aspect and unquestionably Hibernian nationality. On being requested to explain the object of his visit, he, with great courtesy, expressed his regret at being the bearer of an unpleasant communication, stating that he was deputed to wait upon Mr. F—— on behalf of Mr. O'H——, who was under the painful necessity of requiring satisfaction, or a suitable apology, for the offence he had experienced at the hands of Mr. F——.

"Mr. O'H——! offence! satisfaction! apology!" exclaimed the astonished Mr. F——. "My good sir, there must be some mistake in this matter. I have had no quarrel with Mr. O'H——, for whom I have the highest esteem and respect; and I certainly have given him no offence. Your visit must have been intended for some other person." "Excuse me, sir," said Captain Mac Sweeny, "there's no mistake in life! my business is with *you;* and if you please, we must proceed to settle it." "But I tell you," remonstrated Mr. F—— with increased bewilderment, "Mr. O'H—— and I have never quarrelled, nor had a single unpleasant word between us. Why, sir, I dined in his

company only yesterday." "Precisely, sir; at the Eumelian Club, as I am aware. It was on that occasion that the unfortunate circumstance occurred, which has given rise to my present proceeding." "Impossible, sir: I do not think Mr. O'H—— and I exchanged half a dozen words in the course of the evening. We had not even the shadow of a dispute." "That may be, sir; nevertheless, it was then and there, that the offence was given. You will perhaps recollect that there was a ballot, and that a friend of yours, Mr. —— was black-balled." "Well, sir, what then?" "Why, sir, you were, as I have been informed, so good as to say that by that little incident, the club was disgraced; or words to that effect. Now, sir, the Eumelian Club, as I am given to understand, consists of forty members; and Mr. O'H—— considers that if, in your opinion, any disgrace attaches to the club, on the grounds you have stated, *one fortieth part* of that disgrace falls upon him; and, as a gentleman, he is not prepared to submit to even that proportion of the general aspersion which you have cast on the character of the society."

Whether Mr. O'H—— having thus, in his view, received the *fortieth part of an insult*, was pacified, as according to his own views he should have been, by *the fortieth part of an apology*, I am not able to state. But it will easily be imagined that the matter was arranged without a hostile meeting. The affair, however, caused considerable excitement in the Club; and so much unpleasant feeling was occasioned by the display of quixotic sensitiveness on the one hand, and the rather blameable petulance which had called it forth on the other, that the two individuals principally concerned, ceased thenceforth, almost entirely, to frequent the meetings of the society.

I have already alluded to the "Alfred," as having been an early, if not the earliest example of that class of institutions now so common in London, which may be described as the *non-political* and *non-sporting domiciliary* club; and I believe I should be justified in asserting that the idea which the numerous establishments in question have so fully developed, emanated from the ranks of the Eumelian, and was, if not first started, at least early discussed at the social board of that fraternity.

The late Sir Thomas Bernard, whose name has been mentioned in a previous chapter, in connection with the formation and establishment of the British Institution, was unquestionably the originator and active promoter of the Alfred, and contributed greatly, by his zealous exertions and extended personal influence among the most intellectual portion of the higher classes of London, to obtain for the infant society a degree of public favour and consideration, which has certainly never been since extended to any assemblage of the kind. For many years it stood nearly alone, or at any rate in the enjoyment of an undisputed pre-eminence, in the particular category of club statistics to which it was to be referred; and however anxiously sought after, in our own day, may be the social and *quasi* domestic privileges of the Athenæum, the Union, and other flourishing societies of the same character, it is certain that the *entrée* of the Alfred, during the years when its popularity was at the highest, was a matter attended with a much greater amount of difficulty, and involving something far more nearly resembling a social triumph.

It was at one of the dinners of the Eumelian Club at the Thatched House, in the early part of the year 1808,

that Sir Thomas Bernard, in conversation with Mr. Shee and others,—animadverting with regret on the exclusively political or sporting character of the clubs already existing, which professed to afford to their members the comforts and conveniences of a handsome domestic establishment, observed that it was much to be desired that a club should be set on foot, combining all the social and material advantages of White's or Brookes's, without that leaven of party spirit or political feeling, which rendered those establishments inaccessible to any man who did not yoke himself to the car of one or the other of the parliamentary leaders of the day, and without affording to the younger members of the society, those opportunities and examples of high play, which rendered the *entrée* of either of those distinguished *rendezvous* of the patriot and the senator, not only equivalent to a formal and irrevocable pledge of particular political opinions, but a moral ordeal of the most serious and dangerous character.

It would, he suggested, be feasible to form a society of that class, who might meet on neutral ground as to politics, in a building devoted to their social and personal comfort, well supplied with the current literature of the day, and, in process of time, enriched with a judiciously selected library. Such an institution, not identified with any particular class-interests or views, might include within its ranks the *élite* of all those classes whose combined intelligence and talent make up the sum of the most agreeable and refined society in London. The heads of the Church, the law, and the various learned and scientific sections of the social fabric, might be advantageously mingled with the statesman, the politician, the man of rank and fashion, the wit, the artist, and the *littérateur* of emi-

nence. A daily house-dinner might give to those who were so disposed, the opportunity of enjoying the advantages of a club formed for convivial and conversational purposes; while the library and morning rooms would afford literary occupation or amusement, and the opportunity of hearing and discussing the news of the day, to all who might have an hour to spare from their ordinary business or pursuits.

The probable success of an establishment formed upon these judicious principles, was discussed with some variety of opinion as to the result; and on Mr. Shee's part, with strong misgivings as to the popularity of an undertaking, the scheme of which repudiated all aid from the operation of two such powerful elements of social aggregation, and corporate adhesion, as identity of political views, and the love of high play.

The social expediency of the plan could not, however, be for a moment disputed, even by those who were disposed to question its feasability; and Mr. Shee, when a few weeks later applied to by the committee, to allow his name to be enrolled amongst the members of the club,—the project of which had exhibited a most rapid and satisfactory development,—willingly consented to join an institution so auspiciously started, and so deserving of success in every point of view.

The chief promoter of the undertaking,—who, indeed, deserves to be described as its founder,—Sir Thomas Bernard, appears to have possessed the most consummate tact, and the most effective personal influence in organising the framework of the various societies, the existence of which was traceable to his instrumentality: and in no instance were these rare qualities more successfully exhibited, than in the triumphant launching of the "Alfred." The great political, ecclesiastical,

and literary names that graced the original committee, operated so powerfully in the way of social attraction, that before a month had elapsed from the issuing of the prospectus,—signed by (*inter alios*) the Bishop of London (Dr. Beilby Porteus), the second Earl Spencer, and his still more distinguished son, the third earl, then Lord Althorp, the late Earl of Mountnorris, then Lord Valentia, and the Lord Chief Baron Macdonald, — the number of members, limited at first to five hundred, was complete; and it was found indispensable to extend the original plan by fixing the full complement of the club at six hundred, — so great was the press of unexceptionable candidates who were eager to respond to the appeal of the committee, and ambitious of being enrolled in this select fraternity.

The additional hundred were soon selected from the rapidly increasing lists of *aspirans;* and a large body of the inevitably excluded, after waiting with more or less patience, in the hope of a farther extension of the numbers, or in the more tedious expectation of the chances afforded, from time to time, by death vacancies, seceded from the ranks of the *candidature*, and established a club of their own, under the name of the Albion, which flourished for many years, with reasonable success, but greatly inferior social estimation, as compared with the palmy state of its model and (so to speak) parent society.

To those whose experience of club life, in the present day, is associated with mansions of vast extent, and imposing architectural pretensions, rich in decorative splendour, and luxurious accommodation, — combining all the dignity of lofty and spacious halls, gilded saloons, and majestic staircases, with every refinement of modern convenience, and every variety of

material comfort, — the unpretending simplicity and modest dimensions of an ordinary-sized family house in Albemarle Street, would appear to supply a very inappropriate locality for the head-quarters of so distinguished a social community as the "Alfred." Such, however, was their original *domicile;* and although, after the lapse of a few years, the acquisition of the adjoining house, — a residence of no higher class, and nearly similar proportions,—supplied the members with "ample space and verge enough" for the enjoyment of those all-but-domestic comforts, which the originators of the Alfred had scarcely in their contemplation, their unpretending abode never sought to emulate the extent or magnificence of the more recent establishments of the same class.

During a period of nearly twenty years, the Alfred maintained an unquestioned pre-eminence among its competitors; if, indeed, it might not rather be said to enjoy a monopoly of public favour, in reference to that social *spécialité* which was its distinguishing characteristic. The "morning room" was the favourite resort of the wisest and wittiest among the *désœuvrés* of science and literature; — the social and convivial attractions of the "house-dinner," — (there were no coffee-room dinners in *those* days) — were so highly appreciated, and eagerly sought after, that the daily list of twelve, to which number the party was restricted, was, in general, filled up at an early hour in the forenoon; and the press of candidates for admission into the ranks of the club, — as exhibited by the formidable array of names appearing in the printed balloting lists, on the approach of an election, — was kept up in undiminished activity.

But, as may be sometimes observed in the history of

more important communities, the most efficient causes of its early success and prosperity, contained in themselves the elements of its eventual decadence. The strict regularity and uncompromising decorum of its original system, which so powerfully recommended it to the favour of the Right Reverend Bench,—when exaggerated in report, or perhaps too sternly adhered to in practice, afforded a pretext to the disappointed candidate for charging the social character of the club with a degree of austerity, nearly allied to dulness. The absolute *prohibition* of cards was probably felt as a grievance by many an elderly *Alfredian*, to whom an occasional quiet rubber, at long whist, with moderate points, was an accustomed and not very reprehensible evening's recreation,—while the want of a billiard-table might be as sensible a deficiency in the eyes of some youthful members, by whom such an indulgence would have been more valued as an opportunity for the display of scientific skill, and a means of healthful bodily exercise on a wet day, than as a facility for betting or gambling.

In process of time, too, the house-dinner, it is said, began to lose that attractive social variety which originally constituted its chief recommendation, and became the exclusive resort and usurped privilege of a particular *clique*, more remarkable for the mutual constancy of their convivial sympathies, than for the brilliancy of their conversation. This species of monopoly, easily achievable by means of a little management, gave great and just offence to the general body, to whom the house-dinner had offered the occasional attraction of an extemporised and well-selected party, and who were inexpressibly disgusted at finding, day after day, the same uninviting names, suggestive of a *humdrum* evening, filling up, or all but filling up,

the dinner list, at the earliest practicable hour in the morning.

Whether there be or be not any truth in the anecdote,—frequently related,—of a member unknown to the eleven *habitués*, joining the house-dinner one day as the twelfth, and after dazzling the company by his wit and eloquence during the repast, and taking an early leave, being then, and then only, revealed to their bewildered consciousness by a compassionate and half-contemptuous waiter, as "the great Mr. Canning!"—the mere ventilation of such a story, is sufficient to show how much the social and intellectual character of the club had sunk in public estimation, at the period to which the real or well-imagined occurrence was referred.

The rapid decline of the Alfred, however, certainly dates from the period—about the year 1824 or 1825,—when the Athenæum, an establishment more strictly in accordance with the "spirit of the age," in these matters, and embodying some of the most valuable principles of the Alfred, as originally founded,—was projected, organised, and started, with great rapidity and brilliant success, by the combined energies of the late Mr. Heber, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and, though last not least, the Right Honourable John Wilson Croker. Into this new and soon highly popular club, the best blood of the Alfred was quickly transfused; for the original list of the Athenæum could boast a large proportion of the most distinguished names which still graced, or had formerly graced, the books of the venerable and once flourishing fraternity of Albemarle Street.

From this period, the days of the Alfred were numbered; and although, with tardy wisdom, and slowly-

awakened perception of the moral and social requisites of the time, the managing committee gradually and successively introduced the dangerous innovations of a commodious and well-appointed coffee-room,—card-tables, with a judicious limit as to stakes, a billiard-room, a smoking-room, and—most significant and portentous change of all—*a stranger's coffee-room*—the Alfred, so far from regaining its lost vantage-ground, exhibited during many years all the phenomena of gradual decay. But even those members, whose practical acquaintance with the establishment was limited to the experience of the previous ten years, —during the greater part of which period it could certainly boast every comfort and convenience essential to the character of a good and well-conducted club, while its social *matériel* was unexceptionable, although retaining but few of its original and special characteristics,—could hardly be prepared for the singular termination of its once brilliant career, which was arrived at, some three or four years back, not by the ordinary process of dissolution or dispersion, but by a junction with, and total merging of its identity in, the ORIENTAL CLUB. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Sir Martin's early connection with this remarkable society, and, I may indeed say, the active share he took in its original formation, will, I trust, be considered to afford some excuse for the digression into which I have been betrayed, in recording these particulars of its history.

Among the many persons of note with whom the chances of professional and social life brought Mr. Shee into contact, at or about this period of his life, a few names occur which invite a passing notice from his biographer, as being more or less identified with the

brightest memories of the age, or honourably connected with its intellectual history.

In the front rank of these stands his friend and countryman, Thomas Moore, who was made known to him at a very early stage of the poet's literary career, and with whom he continued on terms of friendly regard during the remainder of their joint lives. The letters and journals of Thomas Moore, as recently given to the world by Lord John Russell, contain some passages which bear testimony to the existence of this intimacy, by a very brief record of a quiet dinner in Cavendish Square, and a passing but emphatic tribute to the virtues and sterling worth of the host. These modest entries in the poet's diary were no doubt unconnected with the remembrance of those brilliant social triumphs, to the achievement of which he sacrificed so much of the available energy of his mind, and perhaps some of the higher objects of his life. But they note the recurrence of days, whose tranquil and rational enjoyment might often contrast favourably with the dazzling, but feverish excitement of his ordinary London existence. Nowhere, indeed, could he meet with a more sincere admiration of his genius, a keener appreciation of his wit, a more lively interest in his success, or a more cordial sympathy in his feelings, than under the roof, and in the domestic circle of his fellow-countryman and fellow-poet; and there were probably but few houses where he was more thoroughly free, from that conversational *constraint*, which the widespread reputation of a brilliant talker imposes on him in his more formal intercourse with society, thereby annexing a heavy penalty to the possession of that species of social pre-eminence, which, however fairly won, is not to be permanently retained, without occasional and sometimes irksome effort.

Among those who, on reference to his professional memoranda, appear to have given employment to Mr. Shee's pencil in the year 1807, we find the name of Mrs. Thomas Hope, afterwards Viscountess Beresford, a lady who during many years occupied the most distinguished position in society, where her great personal beauty, winning grace of demeanour, and amiability of disposition, combined to render her the object of universal homage, and the theme of unanimous admiration. Nor was it the least of her titles to the favour of the world *par éminence*, that she was the wife of the accomplished antiquary and *virtuoso*, whose name was at that period chiefly associated with the development of public taste, and the judicious display of the most elegant refinements of life, in the exercise of a splendid and graceful hospitality,—claims to social consideration which, however legitimate in themselves, were some years later, merged in the more permanent distinction achieved by him in the highest field of literary fiction.

To the professional relations connected with the execution of the portrait in question, one of the most successful which ever proceeded from his pencil, Mr. Shee was probably indebted for his subsequent intimacy, if not for his original acquaintance, with the gifted author of "Anastasius," whose princely residence in Mansfield Street was at that time the favourite resort of all that was most brilliant and distinguished in society; while his own social and intellectual merits, acknowledged and appreciated by all, were greatly enhanced in the eyes of an artist, by a rare familiarity with the theory and principles of art, and an enlightened and active zeal for its encouragement and promotion.

On the other hand, Mr. Hope, while fully alive to the professional merits of Mr. Shee, was not less disposed

to do justice to his literary claims and general powers of mind. He appears, indeed, to have been one among many of the friends and admirers of Mr. Shee, who, at this period, formed sanguine expectations and hazarded confident predictions of his elevation to the chair of the Royal Academy, in immediate succession to the distinguished artist who then held the office of President—Benjamin West—whose increasing years rendered the choice of his successor a matter of legitimate speculation.

Had such a vacancy occurred at or about the period to which this narrative now refers, it seems by no means improbable that this,—the highest object of a British artist's ambition,—might have been much earlier placed within the reach of Mr. Shee. His reputation, as a painter, was, at that time, as fully established with the public, as with his brethren of the Academy; and his recent literary successes were so closely connected with the subject of the arts, and attributable to qualities of mind and results of study, so material to their prosperity and advancement, that they might fairly be considered as constituting an additional qualification for the discharge of the duties appertaining to the office in question,—and would, perhaps, have turned the balance in his favour, when the strictly professional claims of those who might aspire to the distinction were, in general estimation, nearly on an equality.

His great competitor, Lawrence, although,—after some strange fluctuations of public favour in his regard,—beginning to experience a satisfactory return of his well-merited popularity, was, nevertheless, at that time, far from occupying the vantage-ground of professional pre-eminence, on which, a few years later, he took that permanent station, from which he was never subsequently displaced. Hoppner, one of the most successful,

as one of the most gifted of the British School of portraiture, had died towards the close of the year 1809. Of his elder contemporaries in that department of the art, Beechey and Owen indeed survived in undiminished vigour,—and there were other portrait painters of great subsequent eminence, who were rising rapidly in the estimation of the public. But neither Beechey nor Owen could be considered as filling, in the eyes of the world, or in the judgment of their fellow-academicians, a more conspicuous or more creditable position than the subject of this biography; and of those who were afterwards, for many years, among Mr. Shee's most formidable rivals in art, and most valued colleagues in academic duty,—no one was as yet qualified by professional standing, or, I believe I may say, by academic rank,—to enter the lists as a candidate for the Presidency.

It must be borne in mind that at the period in question, although the ranks of the Academy included many names of great distinction in the highest walk of the art,—the attention and favour of that portion of the public who felt or feigned an interest in matters of taste, were chiefly engrossed by the efforts of the leading portrait-painters. In addition to West himself—a painter of history to whom the majority of his contemporaries and the succeeding generation have done but scanty justice—there were, indeed, in the academy, men, like Northcote and Fuseli, in the same department of art, whose claims ranked deservedly high among the few who were competent to appreciate the merit of their works. But there was, perhaps, no one among them who possessed, in the same degree as Mr. Shee, the many important requisites of administrative talent, grace and readiness of oratory, and sound deliberative

judgment in all matters constituting the diplomacy of the art and the academy,—which were found so effective, at a later period, during his presidency, and which all who understand the nature of the office must admit to be highly desirable in its possessor, if not absolutely essential to the proper exercise of its functions.

But, whatever may have been the hopes or wishes of Mr. Shee's private friends or professional admirers, with regard to this important subject, I have not the slightest ground for supposing that at this period, or, indeed, at any other time previous to the death of his immediate predecessor in the chair of the Royal Academy, he entertained any definite expectation of succeeding to that high office,—his own claims to which he was little inclined to rank before those of Sir Thomas Lawrence, for whose genius, as we have already seen in the extracts from his early correspondence, he felt the sincerest admiration.

In the meantime, there were minor distinctions connected with academic office,—of sufficient importance to be valued and coveted by some whose names are honourably recorded in the history of British art,—which were apparently within his reach, had he been ambitious of obtaining them. The professorship of painting in the Royal Academy, vacant by the lamented death of Opie, in the year 1808, was conferred on one scarcely less distinguished in the higher branch of the art, and perhaps more conspicuous for general knowledge and intellectual power,—the late Henry Fuseli.

But numerous and rare as were the qualifications of that eminent man for the office which he afterwards filled, during many years, with such distinguished reputation, he was unwilling to encounter the risk of a contest with Mr. Shee for the vacant professorship, and it was

not until he was satisfied by the personal assurance of the latter that he had no intention or desire of occupying the chair in question, that Mr. Fuseli determined on declaring himself a candidate for the appointment.

It must not be supposed that this implied acknowledgment of Mr. Shee's superior chances in reference to the vacancy in question, involved an admission on the part of Mr. Fuseli either of actual inferority as an artist, or of inferior estimation among his colleagues of the academy. Certainly Sir Martin himself would have been the last person to draw, from the circumstance I have just related, an inference so derogatory to the just claims of Fuseli, and the judgment of the academic body. It is not always he who exhibits the greatest proficiency, or displays the most conspicuous genius, in the practical department of art or science, who is best qualified to impart judicious precept in connection with its theory, or trace out the most effective course of study to be followed by those who seek to devote themselves to its cultivation. The qualities which Fuseli might reasonably recognise as constituting a ground of preference in Mr. Shee's favour, on an academic ballot for the vacant professorship, were no doubt more of a literary and intellectual, than of a strictly artistic character; qualities which would in themselves have been insufficient to justify such a preference, and yet, when combined with a high degree of professional merit, might fairly preponderate over the claims of those whose competency to instruct others by precept, was simply matter of inference from their own success in supplying the examples of excellence.

To those who, from personal experience or contemporary tradition, are aware of the social *spécialités* identified with the recent memories of Holland House,

it will seem nearly a matter of course that the reputation achieved by Mr. Shee, in his two-fold character of painter and poet, should have had the effect of drawing him within the enchanted circle to which that historical residence is indebted for its peculiar celebrity in our day; a celebrity which has cast into the shade the accumulated glories connected with the ownership and occupation of the ancient and venerable pile, during the two previous centuries.

From his professional memoranda, I find that, among the pictures painted or commenced by Mr. Shee in the year 1810, he was engaged on a portrait of one of the youthful members of the Fox family, as a commission from Lord Holland; but I believe that his acquaintance with that amiable and accomplished nobleman, and his experience of the far-famed hospitalities of Holland House, date from an earlier period. To the fascination of the society which he met at that unrivalled table, and the rare conversational ability for which the noble host was as remarkable, as for steadiness of principle in politics, and impressive eloquence in debate, Sir Martin's reminiscences did ample justice. No house, certainly, in the present day, combines in its habitual society the varied and comprehensive attractions which distinguished this time-honoured mansion:—a favoured haunt of literature and science, without the affectation and pedantry which often cast a certain degree of ridicule over the social assemblies of *savans* and men of letters;—a *focus* of *party*, without that predominance of political feeling, which detracts from the charm of colloquial intercourse, among men untrammelled by the responsibilities of public life, and unengrossed by thoughts of parliamentary divisions;—a courtly and aristocratic circle, where high rank and distinguished fashion were

gracefully blended and judiciously intermingled with every species of intellectual celebrity and eminence, to the mutual improvement and better understanding of all parties;—a banqueting-hall, where the refined pleasures of the table, developed according to the highest standard of gastronomic science and culinary art, served but to enhance the mental and social enjoyments of which they constituted the effective accompaniments. There, amid all "the pride, pomp, and circumstance" of wealth and lordly splendour,—amid the conflicting pretensions of rival statesmen, poets, *savans*, and dandies,—the tact of the host and the intrepid but impartial autocracy of the fair and formidable hostess pleasantly maintained that general level of social equality, which genius and wit alone were allowed to disturb, by the occasional assertion of an unconscious superiority, and where the pride of station and the arrogance of intellect were alike restrained by a salutary fear of social *inconvenance*, and a prudent calculation of the chances of witty rebuke.

It must be owned that, if Holland House, at the period to which I now refer, and for many subsequent years, exhibited this rare combination, and enjoyed so enviable a social pre-eminence, the political and intellectual circumstances of the time were such as to contribute powerfully to the fortunate result. The character of the Holland House circle, so far as it was made up of peers, statesmen, wits, and politicians, was essentially *whig;* and after the final breaking up of the administration of "all the talents" on the death of Mr. Fox, it was probably a very rare thing to meet a ministerial magnate or an official *notability* within the precincts of that classic region of pure and hereditary whiggery. But though "the good things of this world," politically

speaking, were monopolised by the tories, the preponderance of wit, eloquence, and genius, in society as in parliament, was greatly in favour of the opposition ranks.

Among the tories, indeed, the name of George Canning claims a glorious pre-eminence, as at once the most brilliant orator and the most fascinating talker of the day: and few conversational reputations have retained the traditional honours which still distinguish the memory of Sir William Scott, afterwards Lord Stowell. But the ranks of whig society exhibited a long array of names, comprising the brightest ornaments of the senate and the bar, with nearly all that was most eminent in literature, most noted for wit, and richest in promise of future intellectual distinction. When we reflect that among the whigs who flourished in contemporaneous splendour, and whose social or political reputation dates as far back as the period of which I am now writing, are to be found the names of Grey, Lansdowne, Byron, Erskine, Dudley, Melbourne, Romilly, Brougham, Mackintosh, Horner, Sheridan, Curran, Grattan, Plunkett, Roger Moore, Jekyll, Luttrell, and though last not least, the incomparable Sydney Smith — it will be no matter of wonder that the society of a house which could boast of such men as its habitual and familiar guests, should have left a traditional reputation hitherto unrivalled in the annals of social and intellectual enjoyment.

It was at Holland House that Mr. Shee for the first and only time, found himself in company with an illustrious Irishman, to whom, in common with all his fellow countrymen of the ancient and still partially proscribed faith, he looked up with feelings of gratitude and veneration fully justified on the part of the Irish Catholic,

by the political career of the distinguished patriot in question, the Right Honourable Henry Grattan. The dinner party was large; and the chances of the table afforded Mr. Shee no favourable opportunity of judging of the social qualifications of this ornament of the defunct Irish Senate. The few words that passed—they can hardly be said to have been exchanged — between them, were of the most laconic character; but the subject to which they referred, may invest them with some degree of interest in the narration.

It was during the period when the general question of conceding the political rights of the Catholics, was mixed up with the discussion of the expediency of allowing to the sovereign, a *veto* on the appointment of the prelates of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Those who are familiar with the history of the great struggle for religious liberty in the early part of this century, need not to be reminded of the importance attached by both parties to this collateral question of the *veto*. But to the present generation, with whom the strife and heart-burnings inseparable from that protracted contest are fortunately matter of comparatively remote history, it may not, perhaps, be superfluous to state, that among the real or pretended friends of Catholic emancipation, in parliament and in the ministry, there were some who strenuously urged on the Irish Catholics the wisdom of conceding to the crown this negative voice in the nomination of the prelates of their Church, on the pretext that it would tend to disarm the hostility of the "No Popery" party, by diminishing their alarm on the score of the "divided allegiance" imputed to the Catholics, and thus pave the way for the full concession of their political rights.

It is well known that the consent of the reigning

Pope, Pius VII., to the proposed arrangement, had been duly obtained by the Government; and, indeed, so anxious was His Holiness to secure the acquiescence of the Irish Catholic prelacy in the contemplated measure, that, in the year 1811, he despatched Monsignor Quarantotti, a prelate attached to the pontifical household, on a special mission to Ireland, for the purpose of recommending, and, if practicable, enforcing its adoption.

But on this, as on many other occasions, that Right Reverend body effectually vindicated themselves from the charge of *ultramontanism*, as far as that term is understood to imply a slavish submission to the views or wishes of Rome, in matters affecting their personal convenience or political independence, even when, as in this case, such matters are fairly within the range of ecclesiastical discipline. They felt probably no great repugnance to an arrangement, which was all but certain to be followed by some measure securing to them a permanent and suitable pecuniary provision from the state;—a plan in agitation during the administration of Mr. Pitt, with (it is understood) the full sanction of the court of Rome, but frustrated by the operation of the same cause that ultimately prevented the adoption of the *veto*. This was the fear entertained by the clergy, lest an avowed connection with the state should weaken their influence over the people, whose political chiefs, in their systematic and now really formidable agitation for the removal of the Catholic disabilities, reckoned on the strenuous co-operation of their pastors, and were consequently ready to denounce, as an act of base treachery, any compromise on the part of the clergy, in dealing with the Government, which did not assume, as a *sine quâ non*, the full concession of the civil and political rights of the laity.

Meanwhile, the ostensible grounds on which the proposed measure was discussed, were of a very different character from those on which the support and opposition it received, were really based; and it may, perhaps, be safely asserted that there was an equal want of candour and sincerity, in the arguments of its promoters, and in those of its opponents. The intermediate revelations of contemporary history, for which we are indebted to the publication of the Buckingham Papers, and other private memoirs of similar authenticity and interest, justify the assertion that the Government were insincere in their endeavour to recommend the adoption of the veto, as a stepping-stone towards Catholic Emancipation, which Mr. Percival and the majority of the cabinet were fully determined not to concede under any circumstances; their real object — if indeed they had any object beyond that of creating a division among the Catholics, with a view of weakening their political power—being to secure the inaction of the hierarchy, or obtain the exercise of their influence, in repressing the violence of lay agitation; while, on the other hand, the pretended theological difficulties paraded by the opponents of the measure, in noisy and bombastic declamation against the fearful danger to the purity of the orthodox faith and discipline which they affected to apprehend from state interference, were, probably, well known by the loudest of these patriotic declaimers, to have no real existence, either in a technical or strictly spiritual sense.

There were, however, many sincere and zealous friends of Catholic Emancipation, who, deluded by the artifices of the Government, and honestly desirous to disarm popular prejudice by every reasonable concession, strenuously urged on the Catholics the expediency

of acquiescing in the proposed arrangement; and among these was Mr. Grattan. The public part that he had taken in the discussion, and the interest which, among his own party, attached to the expression of his views and feelings on the subject, naturally tended to introduce it as a topic of after-dinner conversation at Holland House, on the occasion to which I am now referring. The bearings of the question were discussed with a good deal of animation by the eager politicians present; and, as the whig element predominated among the company, the majority were much disposed to concur in the regret expressed by Mr. Grattan, that the suggestion of the veto should have been so vehemently opposed by the leaders of the Catholics.

Mr. Shee—although, as the only Irish Catholic present, more deeply interested in the practical results of the controversy, than any of those who were at the moment engaged in it—was little inclined to obtrude his views on a subject respecting which he did not wholly agree with either side. He therefore remained a silent listener on the occasion, more intent, probably, on observing the social demeanour and conversational style of his distinguished countryman, than solicitous about his well-known views on the point at issue;—until, late in the discussion, Lord Holland, recollecting his personal interest as a Catholic in the question, suddenly, and in a very marked manner, appealed to him for his opinion.

As Mr. Shee was seated near the other end of the table, the tone in which Lord Holland addressed him was sufficiently loud to arrest the flow of general conversation, and concentrate the attention of the company on his reply.

"I think," said he very quietly, "that nothing can

exceed the absurdity of the Catholics in resisting the concession of the *veto*, except *that of the Government in requiring it.*"

A short pause succeeded the utterance of this sentence, —propounding, as it did, an opinion so little in accordance with the views of either party: and Mr. Grattan, leaning forward to observe the speaker, who was seated on the same side of the table as himself, and had, probably, until that moment, escaped his notice,— remained silent for a few seconds, and, then addressing Mr. Shee, said emphatically, "I believe you are quite right, Sir!"

It was at the house of Mr. William Smith, for so many years M.P. for Norwich, that Mr. Shee first became acquainted with Lord Byron, at that time in the zenith of his popularity, and in the full blaze of that poetical renown which had at once reached its culminating point, on the appearance of the early cantos of Childe Harold:— a success more brilliant than could have been anticipated, even in reference to the high promise of future excellence, exhibited by the caustic and vigorous satire of "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," the publication of which had created so great a sensation in the literary world, about the time of the author's departure from England in the year 1809. It will perhaps be remembered that, in this work, Lord Byron in a highly complimentary passage, bears testimony to the two-fold merits of Mr. Shee as a poet and a painter*: a fact, the remembrance of which

* "And here let Shee and genius find a place,
Whose pen and pencil yield an equal grace;
To guide whose hand, the sister arts combine,
And trace the poet's, as the painter's line;—
Whose magic touch can bid the canvas glow,
And pour the easy rhyme's harmonious flow,

must have communicated a more than ordinary degree of interest to the introduction, in the case of one of the very select few to whom the noble author of "English Bards" had awarded the rare meed of unqualified praise, in striking contrast to the severe castigation inflicted by him on the literary demerits or delinquencies, which he ascribes, with more or less of justice, to so many of his distinguished contemporaries. In common with most of those who were brought into contact with Byron in general society, at this period of his career, Mr. Shee was no less struck by the unaffected modesty of his demeanour, than by the good sense and talent which, without any attempt at display, he exhibited in conversation.

While dealing with the social reminiscences connected with this portion of Sir Martin's life, and recalling a few particulars of his intercourse with those whose memory lives in the literary or intellectual annals of the period, I ought not to omit the name of the accomplished and amiable author of the "Curiosities of Literature," the late Isaac D'Israeli,—between whom and the subject of this biography, the relations of friendly intimacy and sincere mutual esteem were early established, and continued with unabated cordiality during the life of the former; although his comparatively early retirement to the *otium cum dignitate* of a country residence, had latterly deprived his numerous friends and associates whose lot was permanently cast in London, of those more frequent opportunities of social and personal communication with him, from which all who admired his

> While honours, doubly merited, attend,
> The poet's rival, but the painter's friend."
>
> *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

talents, and appreciated his most estimable character, had derived so much enjoyment.

Although his fame, as a leading citizen of the republic of letters in his day, has been somewhat eclipsed by the brilliant literary and parliamentary career of his still more eminent son,—the name of the elder D'Israeli will always be held in honour by those who cherish the classic traditions of English literature; and the distinguished reputation of the accomplished orator and astute partisan, with whose two-fold glories, as a novelist and a politician, that remarkable patronymic is now more generally associated, cannot but derive additional lustre from ancestral claims so worthy of being conspicuously recorded in the pedigree of genius.

Before I proceed to the subject of Sir Martin's last poetical work connected with the arts, I ought perhaps to notice a few literary efforts of a slighter character, which I have omitted to mention in the exact order of chronology referable to their publication.

The first was a poetical tribute to the memory of Horatio Viscount Nelson; being one of the numerous *morceaux de circonstance* called forth by the heroic and triumphant death of that illustrious naval commander. It was written and published anonymously under the appropriate title of "Victory in Tears," in the midst of the public excitement and national sorrow consequent on the glorious but disastrous day of Trafalgar.

The "Monthly Review" for March, 1815, noticing its republication under the title of the "Shade of Nelson," in the same volume with the "Commemoration of Reynolds," describes it as "an animated effusion," and "one of the earliest, if not the very earliest, that appeared on the lamented occasion."

It is indeed a glowing testimony to the merits and

exploits of the great man whose untimely loss it commemorates, in strains of impassioned and enthusiastic eulogy. Dictated by the warm and sincere feeling of the moment, it breathes the spirit of ardent patriotism, and gives expression, in vigorous language and appropriate illustration, to the sentiments which, with rare and touching unanimity pervaded the public mind, in every class of society, on the occurrence of this great national misfortune.

The death of his friend Opie, in the year 1808, called forth a short and feeling tribute in verse from the pen of Mr. Shee, which was inserted in some of the daily or other periodical publications of the time, and was also re-published in the same volume with the "Commemoration of Reynolds."

In the year 1810, he published a pamphlet of some length, in the form of a letter to the Directors of the British Institution, on the subject of state-patronage as applied to the higher departments of the art. It had its origin in a request from some of the leading members of that "Committee of Taste," that he would give to the world, in a definite and practical shape, his ideas on this much debated topic :—the suggestion of a well-considered scheme, emanating from a quarter entitled to all the attention which professional skill, and acknowledged experience in relation to the requirements of art and the feelings of the artist might fairly command, being, as it was hoped, an incident not unlikely to direct the attention of the Government to the unobtrusive but still highly important interests involved in the question.

It is needless to advert, in this place, to the details of a plan which failed to enlist the services or sympathies of the government of that day, in its promotion,

or to secure for the views which it sought to advance, any greater amount of official consideration than they had previously obtained. Suffice it to say that it recognised the principle of public and free competition, and suggested a graduated scale of pecuniary reward, applicable to the result of the most successful and most meritorious efforts in historical and poetical art, as exhibited by the different candidates for prizes to be offered by the government; while the annual outlay from the funds of the state, which its adoption would have entailed, was insignificant in amount, when considered in reference to the importance of the objects in view.

CHAPTER IX.

1814—1820.

The "Commemoration of Reynolds."—Great Popularity of Sir Thomas Lawrence. — His Mission to the principal Continental Courts. — Death of President West. —Sir Thomas Lawrence elected President. — Successful Efforts of the Artists of Dublin to obtain the Establishment of a Royal Academy of Arts in that City. — Opposition of Mr. Comerford. — The Artists apply to Sir Thomas Lawrence to forward their Views with the Court and the Government. — They consult Mr. Shee. — Letter detailing his Share in the Proceedings.

THE occasion which once more called into action the poetical impulses of the author of "Rhymes on Art," was well calculated to supply the requisite inspiration to one who so deeply cherished the memory, and revered the genius, of the great founder of the British school.

In the spring of 1814, the directors of the British Institution determined on presenting to the public, as the sole *matériel* of their annual exhibition of works of deceased masters, for that season, a selection of the best productions which the private galleries of the country could furnish from the hand of Sir Joshua Reynolds. In connection with this arrangement, the circumstances of the time were thought to afford a fitting opportunity for paying to the memory of this illustrious artist, a public tribute of respect and homage that might serve at once to perpetuate the triumphs of his pencil, and apply a salutary stimulus to the ambition and industry of the rising generation of art.

With this view, it was proposed that a grand banquet

should be given in the rooms of the society in Pall Mall, now so well known as the British Gallery, at which all that was most distinguished in position among those whose names were associated with the interests of the art, and its enlightened encouragement, should be specially invited to attend; and where, amid the glowing wonders of Sir Joshua's pencil arranged on the surrounding walls, the language of judicious panegyric and grateful enthusiasm, proceeding from lips whose accents must ever command the respectful attention of all to whose intelligence they are addressed, might contribute to supply a dignified and auspicious inauguration of the glorious display which was destined to commemorate the genius of Reynolds.

The idea, so happily suggested, met with a full and triumphant development through the effective co-operation of all who were best qualified to promote its realization. Royalty set the example; and the fortunate possessors of the different *chefs-d'œuvre* of the illustrious President, vied with each other in their liberal desire to contribute their *quota* to the splendour of the forthcoming exhibition; while the Prince Regent himself, whose sympathy in the concerns of art was commensurate with his enlightened appreciation of its genuine attributes, was graciously pleased to honour the inaugurative festival by his presence, and confer on the interesting ceremonial the additional *éclat* inseparable from his active participation in the proceedings of the day.

As a leading member of the Royal Academy, and one to whom the fame and character of Reynolds were, in a special manner, endeared by the memory of early kindness and judicious counsel received at his hands, Mr. Shee was one of those to whom these posthumous

honours paid to his name, afforded the most lively gratification. It need hardly be said that he was present on an occasion of such peculiar interest to the art and the Academy, or that he witnessed with unqualified satisfaction, the striking proof it afforded of the veneration in which the genius of Reynolds was held, by the highest and most illustrious personages in the land.

The conspicuous and varied merits of the works by which this scene of graceful and hallowed festivity was adorned, on all sides,—bringing, as it were, at one glance, under the notice of the spectator, the wonderful versatility and fertility of Sir Joshua's pencil, rendered the ceremonial one of surpassing interest in the eyes of Mr. Shee; and it may well be imagined that, in his estimation, it supplied a theme every way worthy of being commemorated in verse.

He had long meditated the attempt to recal public attention to the subject of Reynolds's manifold claims as the founder and glory of the British school, by a poetical tribute to his memory, which might comprise a discriminative examination of his most celebrated works, and develop, in some degree, those principles of taste and pictorial science, of which those works afford such ample illustration. The occasion to which I now refer appeared to supply a fitting opportunity for the partial execution, at least, of this project; and he accordingly applied himself to its accomplishment with characteristic ardour and enthusiasm. Although there was no period of his career at which his professional avocations were more numerous and engrossing, he found leisure to elaborate and complete the projected work, within a wonderfully short space of time after the occurrence of that combination of interesting

circumstances, which had suggested its design and execution.

In reference to the gracious part taken by the Prince Regent in the proceedings which I have just recorded, Mr. Shee conceived that the forthcoming attempt to perpetuate in verse, the merits of which it was the chief object of so unusual a demonstration to exhibit a public and emphatic recognition, might, not inappropriately, be ushered into the word under the august auspices of his Royal Highness's express sanction; the subject being, moreover, intimately connected with the history and reputation of the Royal Academy, a body standing in close and honourable relation to the sovereign. He accordingly solicited, and without difficulty obtained, permission to dedicate the poem to his Royal Highness Prince Regent.

"The Commemoration of Reynolds," published by Murray in 1814, was pronounced by many whose judgment was, at that time, of considerable weight and influence in the dispensation of literary fame, to display poetical merits of a high order; and it may be safely asserted that in vigour of language, grace of imagery, and harmony of versification, it is in no degree inferior to the most successful portions of the "Rhymes" or "Elements of Art." Still, as the subject was one of comparatively limited interest, and requiring for its thorough appreciation a degree of familiarity with the principles and history of the art, not reasonably to be looked for in the general reader, it is no wonder that the poem achieved but a moderate degree of popularity, and was little noticed among the literary productions of the day.

The work being wholly unknown to the present generation, in art as well as in literature, a few extracts

from it may not be unacceptable to the reader, who will be thereby enabled to form some idea of its style and execution.

In the First Part the author passes in review the portraits painted by Reynolds of many of his most distinguished contemporaries; and, in some instances, by an easy transition from the "counterfeit presentment" to the moral, political, or social character of the original, he takes occasion to combine the praises of the painter, with an appropriate homage to the no less illustrious subject of his pencil.

Thus, in alluding to the well-known portrait of Charles James Fox, he introduces the following animated and glowing tribute to the memory of that immortal orator, and great party leader. And now that the once significant denominations of *Whig* and *Tory*, and the chief political theories with which they were respectively identified, or on which their representatives joined issue in fierce parliamentary contest, have passed away from among us, and been consigned to the records of bygone history, there is perhaps little in the eulogistic language of the subjoined lines, which will not find an echo in the heart and judgment of the patriotic Englishman of the day, whether he ranges under the Conservative, or under the Liberal banner.

"Behold! as when applauding senates heard
His ardent voice, and slaves and bigots feared,
Where Fox demands our homage, as of late,
In prime of mind the patriot met his fate.
The friend of peace let every muse commend,
And hail the prince's and the people's friend!
The friend of freedom, — on whose rock sublime,
Britannia's throne withstands the tide of time.
The friend of genius, — for he felt the flame,
And longed to lead his country's arts to fame.

Let Afric's sons before his image bow,
And weave their palmy garlands for his brow,
Who crowned the work that Clarkson's zeal began,
And raised the negro to the rights of man.
Ye arts! whose honours wait on worth below,—
That bid the marble breathe, the canvas glow,—
To latest time the patriot's form convey,
Resound his praise in every poet's lay;—
Who, called to office in an arduous hour,
Employed his ebb of life, his span of power,
To hush the storm of nations to repose,—
To heal the long-afflicted Lybian's woes,—
From Britain's brows to wipe the sanguine stain,
And free his country from the curse of Cain."

It is satisfactory to reflect that a more general diffusion of taste, and a higher degree of mental cultivation, throughout the great mass of society in England, have, during the last few years, opened up to the artist of the present day a wider field of ambitious exertion, and more numerous sources of profitable employment than his predecessors in the art enjoyed in the early part of this century; and that, consequently, a greater number, among the rising generation of painters, are found to devote themselves respectively to the historic, the fanciful, the dramatic, and the illustrative branches of the art. But while it is certainly matter of congratulation that, in their annual display, the walls of the Royal Academy do not exhibit the same undue preponderance of portraits as formerly—a larger proportion of the available space being now devoted to compositions affording a freer scope for the fancy and invention of the artist,—this partial diversion of public taste and patronage into fresh channels, affords no reasonable grounds for the display of that pert spirit of depreciation, in which the superficial critics of the day, who

promulgate their oracular wisdom through the columns of the daily press, have latterly affected to treat the claims of portraiture.

That a department of art, in which Rembrandt, Velasquez, Vandyck, and Reynolds achieved their brightest triumphs, and to the study of which they devoted the greater portion of their lives, should be sneered at by ignorant assumption and envious imbecility, as unfit to be classed among the higher pursuits of the pencil, can be no matter of surprise to those who know how rare is that amount of theoretic and practical knowledge, which qualifies the spectator to discern the merits of a really good portrait, and appreciate the combination of refined taste, nice observation, scientific principle, and executive skill involved in its production. But it might go far to rescue the art of portrait painting, considered in its highest functions and attributes, from the disparaging estimate in question,—even among those who pin their faith most devoutly on the dogmatic infallibility of newspaper criticism,—could we record the numerous instances of failure in that branch of painting, supplied by the professional history of certain great artists of undisputed and transcendent merit in the historical, imaginative, or dramatic department of the art, who, from the time of Hogarth, down to our own day, have diverged, with peculiar infelicity, into the region of portraiture; while, on the other hand, it may be observed that among those who, during the same period, have devoted themselves most successfully to portrait painting as their principal and regular pursuit, many have produced works of a historical or poetical character, that do not suffer by comparison with the happiest efforts of their contemporaries in the highest walks of the art.

Of this, indeed, Sir Joshua himself supplies the most striking and suggestive example; and while he takes rank among the most gifted of those who have devoted their pencil to the illustration of historical or poetical themes, his unrivalled success in the graceful and dignified representation of individual character,—his magical reproduction on canvas of the most captivating aspect and peculiarities of infant and youthful beauty,—in contemporary portraiture, will probably ever constitute a more generally recognised claim to the admiration of the lover of art. Nor because we readily acknowledge in the impressive delineation of Ugolino in his dungeon, surrounded by his dying children, the master mind that could worthily embody the sublime conceptions of an Alighieri, are we called upon to withhold the tribute of our equally heartfelt admiration, from the genius which has transmitted to posterity the noble features, intellectual countenance, and gallant bearing of the intrepid defender of Gibraltar.

By those who are not unwilling to acknowledge the high claims of portrait painting, in its most interesting and intellectual aspect, the following extract will, if I mistake not, be felt as a tribute not less just than graceful and judicious, to the peculiar merits of that branch of the art:—

"Blessed be the skill which thus enshrines the great!
And rescues virtue from oblivious fate,
Which seems to fix the falling stars of mind,
And still preserve their lustre to mankind!
Immortal Art! whose touch embalms the brave,
Discomfits death, and triumphs o'er the grave:
In thee our heroes live—our beauties bloom,
Defy decay, and breathe beyond the tomb!
Mirror divine, which gives the soul to view!
Reflects the image, and retains it too!

Recals to Friendship's eye the fading face,
Revives each look and rivals every grace.
In thee the banished lover finds relief,
His bliss in absence, and his balm in grief.
Affection, grateful, owns thy sacred power;—
The Father feels thee, in affliction's hour,
When catching life, ere some loved cherub flies
To take its angel station in the skies—
The portrait soothes the loss it can't repair,
And sheds a comfort, even on Despair.
How bursts the flood of sorrow past control!
What sense of anguish rushes o'er the soul!
When turning from the last sad rite that gave
His heart's best joy for ever to the grave,
The widow'd husband sees his sainted wife,
In picture warm, and smiling as in life;
Sees her—and feels that never here below,
That smile shall cheer him in a world of woe.
Yet, though 'tis madness on that form to dwell,
Now cold and mouldering in its clammy cell,
Though each soft trait that seems immortal there,
But deeper strikes the dagger of despair:
Say, if for worlds he would the gift forego
That mocks his eye, and bids its current flow?
No—while he gazes with convulsive thrill,
And weeps and wonders at the semblance still,
He breathes a blessing on the pencil's aid,
That half restores the substance—in the shade."

The peculiar species of delinquency, to the castigation of which the subjoined energetic and forcible lines are directed, is happily of such rare occurrence among the professors of British art in our day, that, to many, the author's indignant denunciation of the class of culprits in question, may seem almost a superfluous outpouring of the *splendida bilis*, which is a legitimate characteristic of the poetic moralist, when dealing with

grave social offences against virtue and decency. But,—not to dwell upon the fact that the annals of English painting, in the last century, are not wholly unstained with the disgraceful record of some instances of the monstrous perversion of talent alluded to in the passage I am about to cite,—the deplorable example of a neighbouring country, where the systematic degradation of romantic literature is not without a parallel in the desecration of the powers of painting, may, unfortunately, still supply, as it did at the date of the poem, a too real significance to the censure in which the author so freely indulges: and at a period when the pen of the English novelist cannot always escape the contagion of that deadly *virus*, which blights the genius, as it will blast the memory, of some of the most powerful and original writers of the modern French school, the warning that may tend to rescue British art from the danger of a corresponding infamy of imitation, can hardly be considered obtrusive or inappropriate.

"No painter he, who does not love to trace
The form of Beauty—bright in native grace,
Fresh, as from Nature's hand, the fair is found,
A living lustre—beaming heaven around:
And pure the glowing toil, when undebased
The heart of Genius, and the hand of taste.
But sure no scorn too bitter can pursue,
Or hiss, reviling, from the public view,
The venal slave, who, sold to sin and shame,
The scandal of his country and his name,—
To purpose base can prostitute his art,
And, in the painter, act the pander's part.
The desperate wretch, who rushes wild abroad,
And risks his life, to rob the public road,
While starving infants, stretched beneath his shed,
In piercing peal vociferate—for bread;

The profligate, in vice and folly deep,
Who lulls his conscience and his creed asleep,
Who wastes his life in outrage and offence,
And riots in each rank debauch of sense,
Have each some specious palliative to plead,
Some powerful passion, or imperious need,
Which finding Virtue's vulnerable part,
By sap, or storm, subdues the enfeebled heart.
They pay, themselves, the forfeit of their crimes,—
A warning, not a wound, to future times.
But he, who at his easel, safe retired,
By neither want impelled, nor passion fired,
Can there the noblest gifts of heaven employ,
To poison deep the purest springs of joy:
Who like the mad Ephesian, in his aim,
Would launch through time a reprobated name,—
Would fling his brands—'gainst Dian's temples hurled,
And fire the moral structure of the world,—
For him, who, virtue's most degraded foe,
Corrupts e'en Taste, to strike the coward blow,—
The cold-blood culprit, whose ambitious crime,
Would stimulate the lust of future time:
For him no hope of pardon can remain,
And mercy pleads for his offence in vain."

I shall conclude this extract with an invocation of beauty, which is appropriately connected with a glowing tribute to the successful result of Reynolds's ardent devotion at her shrine.

"Hail, Beauty, hail! ethereal beam that plays
On human hearts and kindles Passion's blaze!
His fires to thee immortal genius owes,
Of thee enamoured still his bosom glows;
Blessed in thy smile, he burns with double flame,
And tastes his heaven on earth—in love and fame.
The only joys a care-worn world can give,
Which make it bliss to feel, and life to live.

Sun of his world! as to the orb of day,
The flower reverting, drinks its vital ray,
To thee the painter turns his eye—his heart,
His lamp of life! his light and heat of art!
Thy visions beaming o'er his fate, diffuse
The glow of taste—the lustre of the muse;
They cheer his ardous progress, and repair
The wrongs of fortune, in his course of care.
" Warm at her shrine, when Reynolds early paid
His ardent vows, and first invoked her aid;
The goddess, soon, her favourite's claim allowed,
And drew her votary from the vulgar crowd;—
Led him to fields, which no rude step defiles,
On Nature's lap where Infant Beauty smiles;
To secret bowers, where oft reclined of yore,
For Zeuxis' sake, fair Helen's form she wore.
* * * * * * * *
" Here Reynolds oft, with Taste, delighted strayed,
And caught some nymph divine, in every shade,
To meet his eye, where'er the master moved,
The bowers grew brighter, and the paths improved.
In glowing groups, the Graces sought to shine,
And asked for life—in his immortal line.
Fired by the scene, he seized the sportive band,-
The gay creation bloom beneath his hand,
As round his magic glass the nymphs repair,
And Love and Beauty leave their image there."

There is little or nothing in the records of Mr. Shee's private or professional life, during the few years that intervened between the publication of this poem and the vacancy of the academic chair in 1820, to call for the notice of the b iographer. During that period, he found active and constant employment for his pencil, in the regular practice of his profession, and maintained his ground in the annual exhibition, with undiminished credit, among the number of able and successful competitors in his branch of the art.

But of these, one had now far distanced all his rivals in the contest for public favour, and might be said to enjoy a monopoly of the countenance and patronage, not only of the court, but of those official and aristocratic circles which, always more or less influenced in such matters by the example of royalty, are doubly so, when, as in this instance, the *prestige* of supreme power and dignity is enhanced in its effect, by the personal qualifications and acquirements of the sovereign, as a man of taste and intellectual cultivation.

The high sense entertained by the Prince Regent of the talents of Sir Thomas Lawrence, (on whom he had recently conferred the rank of knighthood,—a distinction to which his appointment as Serjeant-Painter to the King, had long since given him an obvious claim,) was evinced not long after the peace of 1815, in a very striking and emphatic manner, by the commission with which that able artist was honoured, to paint for the royal collection at Windsor, a series or gallery of historical portraits, illustrative of the events connected with the long continental war which had just been brought to a happy conclusion, and comprising the principal sovereigns who had taken an active share in, or been most deeply interested in the results of the recent struggle, together with the chief ministers and most distinguished generals who had contributed, either by diplomatic skill or military genius, to the restoration of peace and social tranquillity in Europe.

The result of this truly princely commission, executed with the highest credit and success by Sir Thomas Lawrence, during a protracted tour of the principal European capitals, to the different courts of which he was formally accredited for the performance of his

arduous but gratifying task, by the special introduction of his own sovereign, may be seen in the most striking and interesting of the modern works of art which adorn the state apartments of Windsor Castle ; works, with which the reader is, in all probability, familiar, at least through the medium of the engraver's art. The portraits of the venerable Pope Pius VII., of the Emperor Francis II., of the Archduke Charles of Austria, of Cardinal Gonsalvi, of Field-Marshal Blucher, and of Prince Metternich, will always arrest the attention of the lover of art and the enlightened critic, by the sterling merits of composition, execution, and effect, which they display, no less than by the historical interest that attaches to the illustrious names of those, whose outward semblance has been so faithfully and gracefully perpetuated on the glowing canvas of the courtly painter.

Thus distinguished, among his academic brethren, by the peculiar favour of his sovereign, Sir Thomas Lawrence was naturally designated by public opinion as the probable successor of Mr. West,—now very far advanced in years,—in the chair of the Royal Academy. Nor were his brother members and rivals in the career of fame, insensible to his claims, or unwilling to recognise his many important qualifications for that high and enviable position. Among those who were prepared cheerfully to concede to him a pre-eminence in professional and social success, involving a reversionary right to the presidency, Mr. Shee was one of the most open in the avowal of this feeling ; and however the just appreciation of his own talents might induce his most attached friends, and some of his nearest connections, to anticipate a different result of the academic

choice, it is certain that he neither himself entertained, nor encouraged in others, any hope or wish that his brethren would, in the event of the expected vacancy, honour him by a preference which he would have considered on their part as at once unjust and impolitic.

On the death of Mr. West, in the early part of the year 1820, Sir Thomas Lawrence was duly elected President in his place; a choice which afforded equal satisfaction to the court, the profession, and the public. How cordially Mr. Shee contributed to, and acquiesced in the result of this election, the following extract from a letter, written in the month of May of the same year, to a near relative in Ireland, will abundantly show. His observations on some expression of disappointment which appears to have reached him from his partial friends on the other side of the water, bear the impress of a manly sincerity and an unaffected candour which cannot, I think, be mistaken or misunderstood. I should premise, for the better understanding of one passage in the letter, that, at the close of the grand dinner given by the Academy in the rooms of the exhibition, previously to its being opened to the public,—being the first of those annual festivals at which Sir Thomas Lawrence had officially presided,—Mr. Shee had taken occasion to evince his cordial satisfaction at the result of the recent election, by proposing the health of the new President, in terms of graceful and glowing panegyric, and in a strain of hearty congratulation, which seemed to cause no less surprise than gratification to the object of this well-timed and friendly demonstration. It was in acknowledging, with grateful emotion, the generous tribute thus paid to his merits, by one of whose successful

rivalry he might have entertained some apprehension, that Sir Thomas alluded to Mr. Shee's own claims to the academic chair, in the language reported in the subjoined extract.

"London, 7th May, 1820.

. . . . . .

"I find, my dear . . . . , that the members of the Royal Academy have incurred your high displeasure for not having elected me their President. But, believe me, if their conduct were always as defensible as in this instance, they would be a most exemplary body. I voted for Sir Thomas Lawrence myself, and never gave a vote with a more sincere conviction of its justice and propriety, both as to the Academy and the arts. My dear . . . ., we must not allow ourselves to be blinded by partiality. He is the best artist of his time,—the public recognise him as such;—he has been raised in rank by his sovereign, and selected for a kind of mission of art which gives him a consequence and celebrity never before enjoyed by any English artist. He is highly respectable in his appearance and gentlemanlike in his manners, and can support the dignity of the situation, as to expense and establishment, in a way that no other member of the Academy can pretend to. I never for a moment entertained a thought of the situation. Nay, I will go further, and say that, had the Academy conceived the intention of placing me in the chair, I should have thought it my duty to dissuade them from a purpose which I should have considered just neither to him, the art, nor the Academy. He bears his honours like a man of sense, and carried his liberality to me so far as to declare openly, at the close of the late grand dinner of the Academy, that I had strong claims to be chosen to fill the situation which he then occupied. This, you may suppose, surprised me a good deal, and has occasioned considerable sensation amongst connoisseurs and artists here. As far as relates to the interest of my family, I will not pretend to say that I should not be pleased at a dignity of the sort *justly* conferred. But as to my own feelings, I have no ambition whatever for such dis-

tinction. I have lived long enough to know the emptiness and vanity of such delusions. I may truly say with Pope,

"'I am not made for courts and great affairs.'

Would to Heaven I could with equal truth apply to myself the *second* line of the couplet, which I shall leave you to discover in the works of the author."

The following extract from a letter written by Mr. Shee, in the autumn of the same year, relates to the laudable and ultimately successful efforts of the artists of Dublin, to obtain from the Government a charter of incorporation, and the advantage of royal recognition for the society then recently formed, and shortly afterwards duly and formally embodied, under the title of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

As a painter and an Irishman, Mr. Shee had, from the first, taken a lively interest in their proceedings; and entertaining, as he did, a sincere conviction of the benefits likely to result to the arts of his country, and the intellectual character of his countrymen, from the existence of such an institution, he was, it is scarcely necessary to say, both willing and anxious to promote the praiseworthy objects of his brother artists in Dublin, by every means in his power.

Being, however, at the time, wholly unconnected with the court or the ministry, and far remote from the circles of official or political influence, he would have been the last to ascribe any practical weight to the authority of his name, or the expression of his opinion, in the discussion of a question which some persons in Ireland, with more feeling for the principles of trade than the interests of taste, were labouring to expand into a controversy.

It will be seen by the subjoined statement, that it was owing to an accidental combination of circumstances

that his views on the subject were brought under the notice of the government.

The efforts thus made on behalf of the artists of Dublin, for the establishment of a Royal Academy of Arts in that capital, were strenuously combated by one of their body, who was probably the most prosperous individual among them, and whose great professional success, during a long series of years, had invested him with an amount of social importance that rendered his determined opposition to their plans inconvenient and embarrassing, if not actually formidable, to their prospects of success. The artist in question was Mr. Comerford, a gentleman who had attained a very high reputation as a miniature painter in Dublin, and who had unquestionably displayed conspicuous merit in that department of the art. Having long enjoyed a species of monopoly of public favour in his particular branch of the profession, he probably ascribed his success, in some degree, to the absence of that host of competitors whom he thought likely to be called into the field, by the prospect of honour and advantage held out to the ambition of the student, in such a system of academic distinctions as was contemplated by his brother artists. He could, therefore, see nothing in the proposed scheme but the danger to existing interests, involved, as he considered, in the attempt to develop the artistic talent of the country, and stimulate the exertions of the rising generation of painters. He dwelt with earnest, if not convincing emphasis, on the impolicy of a step which must have the effect of raising up numerous, and perhaps successful rivals to those for whom the scanty measure of patronage attainable by the art in Ireland, was already insufficient, save in one or two exceptional cases; thus, as he contended,

running counter to the most elementary principles of political economy, as regards the relative proportions of *demand* and *supply*.

These selfish and tradesmanlike views were not likely to find favour in the eyes of the author of "Rhymes on Art," to whom this mistaken application, or, more properly speaking, perversion of the venerable theories of Adam Smith, seemed little short of "misprision of treason," in matters of taste; and when promulgated in conversation by Mr. Comerford, in some personal interviews with Mr. Shee in Cavendish Square, during the pendency of the negotiations, they were, no doubt, ably as well as ardently opposed in argument by the latter.

It would seem, however, that Mr. Comerford, not content with broaching his *æsthetic* heresies in private, went the length of addressing a letter to the Chief Secretary for Ireland, the Right Hon. Charles Grant, now Lord Glenelg, in which he endeavoured to recommend his peculiar theories to the attention of the Government, with a view of counteracting the efforts of those who were agitating for the establishment of an academy.

Mr. Grant, as the responsible Minister of the Crown in Ireland, was of course the proper official channel through which the wishes of the confederated artists were to be made known to the Government, and the person on whose decision the success or failure of those efforts chiefly depended. But conceiving that, in this case, the sovereign, from his strong feeling in favour of the arts, might perhaps be induced to interest himself personally in the objects of the application, they wisely sought to secure the good offices of the newly elected President of the Royal Academy, in recommending their request to the favourable consideration of His

Majesty, with whom, no less than with the leading personages of the Ministry, the opinion of Sir Thomas Lawrence might reasonably be supposed to have considerable weight.

These details are necessary, for the purpose of enabling the reader fully to understand and appreciate, those passages which I am about to extract from the letter already referred to.

To Miss . . . .

"London, 29th Oct. 1820.

"Roberts has, I find, informed you of my correspondence with the artists of Dublin. Had I thought it matter that would have amused or interested you, I would have before this mentioned it; but your affectionate zeal for what you think my credit lets nothing escape you. Seven or eight months ago, Comerford sent a letter which he had written to Mr. Grant, and of which you have heard, to Cuming the artist, then here, with a request that he would show it to me. The nature of the letter made the circumstance of its communication to me rather a doubtful compliment; as it, in very coarse terms, attempted to refute and reprove opinions which, from several conversations with me, he knew to be mine. Not conceiving myself, however, called upon to interfere, and having no taste for a controversy with Mr. Comerford, I contented myself with expressing to Mr. Cuming, for the information of his friend, my unqualified reprobation of his sentiments. The matter had not again occurred to me till, about two months since, I received a packet from the Secretary of the Artists of Dublin, communicating to me, by the desire of that body, the answer to Comerford's letter, which they had transmitted to Mr. Grant, and soliciting my opinion and approbation of their views. However little time or inclination I had to meddle in the matter, I felt that, as an artist and an Irishman, I ought not to treat with any slight or inattention, a body of my brother artists who thought my opinion worth asking, and a subject which con-

cerned the reputation of my country. I therefore immediately wrote a reply which necessarily led me to comment on Mr. Comerford's production, and also on some parts of the answer to it. Unawares, however, my epistle became much too voluminous for the post, even under privilege of a frank; and as I did not consider my observations of much importance, I wrote an ordinary letter, expressing my acknowledgments for their polite attention, my good wishes for the attainment of their object, and my readiness to transmit the longer letter which I had written, if they had any desire to see it, if they would point out any mode of conveyance which would not put them to an expense, for which the value of the observations I had made could be no compensation. In reply to this, they requested me to send the remarks in question under cover to Mr. Grant the secretary. With this request I complied, and I have since received from them an expression of their acknowledgments, stating that, conceiving my arguments might strengthen their case, they had, under an assurance of my approbation, sent a copy of my letter to Mr. Grant.

"You have here, my dear . . ., a full and complete history of this matter. However little I am indebted to the favour of my countrymen, or even to the *favourable report* of my brother artists in Ireland, I did not think it became me (so solicited) to show a cold indifference to their interests, or an unpatriotic disregard of matters which are so intimately connected with the arts of Ireland. It has always been a rule with me, through life, to do that which was proper for me to do, as far as my judgment enabled me to discover it, without considering how others might conduct themselves, or act towards me. But surely, my dear . . . . ., your warm zeal for me leads you to attack the poor artists of Dublin, on this occasion, without cause. It might, perhaps, have been more delicate if they had gone through the form of asking my leave, before they showed my letter to Mr. Grant; but they knew that the letter was written for any useful, honest purpose, to which they might think it applicable, and they very reasonably concluded I would not object to the use made of it in this instance. As to the degree of credit which they may be disposed to allow me in case their ap-

plication succeeds, you may be assured they never can give me less than I am disposed to claim. The feathers and straws of this kind, which vanity and folly are so anxious to snatch out of the caps of other people to stick in their own, have long since lost their attraction. But on this occasion, it would be really absurd to suppose that the few random shots fired by me at Mr. Comerford's theory of taste, could have more effect on Mr. Grant than the regular battery brought to bear upon him by the artists of Dublin. You seem to think, my dear . . . ., that my brothers of the brush in Dublin have greatly maltreated me, by applying in the first instance to Sir Thomas Lawrence, for the furtherance of their views. But can anything be more natural or more just, than that we should apply for aid to those who are most able to assist us? I would myself have endorsed the application; for I am afraid I must admit that Sir Thomas is the more important personage of *the two;* and that, in a case where influence at court is required, his patronage is of somewhat more consequence than mine. We must take care not to let selfish feelings and unreasonable pretensions interfere with our just estimate of things, or persuade us that people ought to sacrifice their views and interests, in delicate consideration of our mistaken claims, and imaginary importance. . . . . You see, my pretensions are lowered to a very moderate standard. My dignity is by no means touchy or sensitive. My expectations of credit or acknowledgment are so chastened and subdued, as to be hardly within the range of disappointment. If the artists of Dublin succeed in their object, I shall be very much pleased, without considering myself at all entitled to share in their triumph; and if they do not abuse my pictures, my poetry, and my *epistle*, I shall consider myself as having no cause of complaint."

CHAPTER X.

1820—1829.

Correspondence.—Miss Tunno.—The Tragedy of "Alasco" accepted by the Manager and in Rehearsal at Covent Garden.—Extraordinary and fatal Mutilation of the Text by the newly-appointed Examiner of Plays.—Ineffectual Remonstrance to the Lord Chamberlain.—Play withdrawn from the Stage.—Sale of the Copyright.—Injudicious Delay in the Publication.—Extracts.—Singular Critique in Blackwood's Magazine.—The Catholic Question.—State of Parties.—Strong Anti-Catholic Feeling in English Society.—Sensitiveness of Mr. Shee on this Point.—Gloomy Anticipations.—Thomas Moore and "the Poetry of Religion."—O'Connell on the "Gratitude of Nations."—Publication of "Oldcourt."

THE period of ten years which elapsed between the election of Sir Thomas Lawrence to the presidency of the Royal Academy, and the appointment of a successor on the death of that eminent artist, is rather barren of events, so far as the professional and domestic history of Mr. Shee is concerned. The circumstances connected with the theatrical acceptance, and official prohibition of his tragedy of "Alasco," and the less-noticed publication of his novel of "Oldcourt,"—matters of some importance in reference to his literary career,—may, however, supply some details of sufficient interest to claim the attention of the reader. The interval which, with these exceptions, presents but scanty materials for the labour of the biographer, may be partially filled up and illustrated, by some extracts from Mr. Shee's correspondence with the only person to whom, during the last five-and-twenty active years of his life, he was in

the habit of writing on subjects unconnected with professional or official business:—one to whom, as to a most intimate and attached friend, he, with perfect freedom and openness, communicated his thoughts, feelings, and opinions on all matters of public discussion, and moral or political interest;—one whose rare powers of mind, social accomplishments, and intellectual cultivation were a never-failing theme of panegyric to all who came within their attractive influence, or were fortunate enough to witness their unassuming, and apparently unconscious exhibition.

The name of Maria Tunno finds no place in the strictly literary records of her time; although, had she been ambitious of such a distinction, no one was more fully qualified by nature and education, to take a prominent rank among the most gifted of her sex who have, in this century, adorned the literature of our country. But it may be safely asserted, that in the social memories of many among her surviving contemporaries, who are most remarkable for intellectual power, and sympathetic appreciation of congenial talent, her remembrance is still treasured with a mingled feeling of enthusiastic admiration and affectionate regret, such as the brightest reminiscences of mental and moral superiority can seldom suffice to inspire and sustain.

Perhaps no one ever combined in a higher degree the vigour of a masculine and powerful understanding, with that delicacy of feeling and true refinement of mind, that go so far to make up the *beau-idéal* of the female character. Assuredly no one who has enjoyed the privilege of her familiar acquaintance, can ever forget the fascination of manner, the unrivalled grace of demeanour and expression that, in her unstudied con-

versation, gave to the more serious, as well as to the lighter topics of discourse, a charm as rare as it was captivating.

From her early youth, and during the remainder of a life of the most active kindness and constant mental exertion, she enjoyed the friendship of many of the most eminent persons who have graced the social annals of this century; and while encountering these master spirits of the age on a footing of admitted mental equality, and receiving from them the homage of a deferential admiration, she was equally successful in winning the regard and respectful affection of those who, less qualified to appreciate her rare endowments of mind, were not less sensible of the graceful and considerate courtesy, obliging amiability, and genuine warmth of heart which shone conspicuous in every action of her life.

The friendship that subsisted between this highly gifted lady and the subject of this memoir, was of remote date; her family and that of Mr. Shee having been on terms of intimate acquaintance from an early period of the century. To no one, probably, with the exception of his nearest relatives and connections, were his welfare, happiness, and fame matter of sincerer interest, than to the amiable and accomplished family circle of which Miss Tunno was the ornament and the pride; nor among her many attached friends were there any who entertained a higher sense of her talents, or were more fully alive to the attractions of her society, than the future president and his family, to every member of which, she was endeared by the early recollection, and continued experience of friendly and affectionate attention.

Among the many talents for which she was conspi-

cuous, Miss Tunno possessed, in no common degree of perfection, the peculiarly feminine accomplishment of graceful and eloquent letter-writing; and it is no wonder that when, about the period to which the concluding portion of the present chapter refers, she ceased to be a permanent resident in London, those of her friends who had derived most gratification from her society, and could best appreciate her varied ability, were eager to be enrolled in the list of her epistolary correspondents. This privilege, Mr. Shee, in common with many other individuals of note in art, science, and literature, was fortunate enough to obtain; and while about to introduce in this place some extracts from his portion of a correspondence, continued with little interruption until within a few years of his death, I cannot but feel that I should add greatly to the interest which these extracts may possess in the eyes of the reader, were I at liberty to place before him a few specimens of the rare epistolary talent displayed in the letters of Miss Tunno, in reply to which, most of the subjoined were written.

The following extract from a letter acknowledging an invitation to Taplow Lodge, Bucks,—the country residence of Mrs. Tunno (a house the graceful and cordial hospitality of which will long be celebrated in the social traditions of that lovely and attractive neighbourhood), —is rather amusingly characteristic of some peculiarities of Sir Martin's *idiosyncrasy*. Through the stream of lively *badinage* which pervades his observations, those who were intimately acquainted with his real habits of thought and feeling, can easily discern the sincere avowal of a shyness of which few who admired his high bred manners and conversational brilliancy, in general society, could ever suspect the existence.

To Miss Tuñno.

"London, Thursday, October 24th, 1822.

"To say the truth . . . I believe I must consider myself as having, on the subject of visiting my friends, something of what is vulgarly called a *twist* in the understanding. Philosophers say that there is no man, of those called rational, who is not mad upon some one point; and no man of those considered to be mad, who is not rational in some one particular. Undoubtedly, where we are not reasonable, we must be either mad or foolish; and there is something more respectable in madness than in folly. I would, therefore, consider all the peculiarities of mind, which commonly are spoken of under the denominations of oddity, obstinacy, eccentricity, *étourderie*, indiscretion, &c., as so many points in the great compass of insanity, and that, as Hamlet says, we are all mad north-east or north-west, or south and by east. Now, unluckily, there are so many points upon which, on this theory, I must consider myself *non compos*, that I begin to fear, should one or two more be added to the number, my friends may think me a fit subject for a strait waistcoat. With respect to the reluctance I always feel to avail myself of the kind invitations of my friends, I have long been considered in the *domestic circle* absolutely insane. I have had all sorts of lectures on the subject—*curtain* and *closet*, —from the mildest remonstrance, to the most energetic expostulation . . . . . but all in vain. I have never been able to overcome an unfortunate impression that, whatever civility might be expressed, I was never really welcome anywhere. This impression you will laugh at as absurd, ridiculous, and vulgar; or perhaps you may suspect the statement of it as an affectation of modesty. But such as it is, it has deprived me of many pleasures of society, and contributed to poison those which it did not prevent. It has invariably operated on my feelings, and I have no doubt materially influenced my progress in life. Nay, to such an extent has it sometimes been carried, that even in a common dinner engagement, I have thought that my friends grew tired of me before the cloth was removed, and that by the time tea and coffee were served, they considered me an absolute

bore, and began to speculate on the hope of my speedy departure.

"After such a manifestation of my morbid feelings on this subject, you will naturally conclude that I am about to express my regret that I cannot avail myself of your kind invitation. I hope such an anticipation will not be very agreeable to you, because I should regret, in that case, your disappointment, when I tell you, my admirable friend, that, however irrational I may be on the subject, I am neither so mad nor so foolish as to refuse the gratification you have thus a second time placed within my reach. Most assuredly, if you come to town on the second of November, and continue in your kind disposition to take me with you to Taplow—to Taplow I will go, if chaos 'were to come again.'"

Of the truthfulness of the picture thus exhibited, however veiled under the semblance of jocular exaggeration, no one was more able to judge than his fair and accomplished correspondent; and she would not unfrequently avail herself of the privilege, and exercise one of the most valuable functions of friendship, by gently rebuking the indulgence of that over-sensitive spirit to which the peculiar feelings in question were fairly ascribable. A year later we find him, in answer, apparently, to some kind and judicious remonstrances on the subject of his general distaste for society, and his habitual observance of a degree of seclusion incompatible with the worldly interests of an artist, expressing himself in terms more gravely indicative of the state of mind against which her protest was earnestly, but, it would seem ineffectually, directed.

To the same.

"London, June 4th, 1823.

. . . . . .

"I must ever feel more than flattered by the kind interest which prompted your sensible and eloquent remonstrances against

those habits of seclusion which, as far as worldly prudence permits, and perhaps a *little* farther, I am disposed to indulge in. I confess, also, that I derive another gratification from your excellent remarks on this subject; and that is, the consideration that you are too perfect a moralist not to *practise* what you preach, and instruct by example as well as precept. I am particularly delighted to be furnished, from your own stores, with so many excellent arguments against those retiring propensities for which you have shown so early a predilection; and when you, upon whom society has so many claims, and who have it in your power to communicate to it so many pleasures, — when you are disposed to withhold from the circle of your friends that charm which your presence must always give to it, I shall turn your own eloquence against you, and flourish triumphantly the weapons with which you have yourself supplied me. As to myself, I confess I feel every day less inclined to mix in what is commonly called society, or what, from the peculiar stiffness and congelation of our *ill manners*, may be better termed *company*. In periods of higher hope and more buoyant spirits, I could rarely go through one of our dinner or drawing-room formalities without feeling, at some moment of the *entertainment*, an almost invincible desire of extrication from the *ennuyant* restraints which they inspired. Now that the spring of animal vivacity is a good deal relaxed — that the desire of pleasing is almost as extinguished as the hope, — and all the flattering visions of felicity and fame are subdued to the sober certainties of care and disappointment, I am still less charmed with those insipid collections of common acquaintances — those frivolous resorts of all that is vain, pompous, and formal — that is empty, heartless and uninteresting in human intercourse; — and the contrast between the natural aspect of seriousness and anxiety which the events of life produce, and the artificial visor of affected ease and self-satisfied confidence which you are obliged to wear, in the general masquerade of mind, renders it a matter of most irksome operation to support the character in which policy and propriety require you to appear. On these occasions, to show ourselves to any advantage, we must put on a holiday face. To be welcome in the circle, we must all look happy and prospe-

rous. We must put on the *peacock* in company, however we may droop the wing upon the perch at home. . . . . You see, therefore, that the *chimney-corner* is the only place for me. *There* I am always sure to find affection, with gentle hand, ready to smooth down the ruffled feathers of vanity and disappointment, and mistaking my *crow* quills for *ostrich* plumes. Though not a prophet, or honoured in my own country, I have, at least, the satisfaction of being *honoured* in my *own home* — of having a small circle

"'Where I shine on high,
A fancied Phœbus in affection's eye.'

This, you will say, is no trifling good. To be a *great man* at home is, perhaps, the best consolation this world affords for being but a *little man* abroad."

Some time during the summer or autumn of the year 1823, Mr. Shee offered to the management of Covent Garden Theatre, for production on that time-honoured stage, — whose scenic glories are, alas! now merely traditional, — a dramatic attempt which had afforded, at intervals, the occupation and amusement of his leisure hours during the previous year or two. The performances at that house were, at the period in question, directed by the administrative skill and judgment, and sustained by the conspicuous professional talent, of that admirable actor and accomplished gentleman, the late Charles Kemble. By this experienced judge of histrionic effects and probabilities, the tragedy of "Alasco" was gladly received, and in due time put in rehearsal, with the openly avowed, and sanguine expectation, on his part of a brilliant, and triumphant success, he himself undertaking the personation of the hero, whose character had, in truth, been drawn with some prospective reference to Mr. Kemble's physical and intellectual qualifications for its judicious embodi-

ment. The story, not founded on fact, was supposed to relate to an unsuccessful insurrection of the native population, in a district of that portion of the ancient kingdom of Poland which fell to the lot of the Prussian monarchy in the final partition of that ill-fated and hopelessly anarchical country. Such a subject, obviously within the range of the strictest social, literary, and political propriety, necessarily involved the characteristic expression of sentiments and feelings, connected with the causes, and suited to the moral atmosphere of national revolt; and the sympathy so generally felt or expressed, for many years, by the British public of all classes and parties, for the wrongs and misfortunes of Poland, would have seemed to afford reasonable assurance, that the dramatic delivery of language appropriate to the position of those who were represented as struggling to restore her political nationality, could not, apart from any expression of a republican, democratic, or anti-social tendency, be fraught with danger to the loyalty or peaceful principles of a sober London audience.

So far, however, from the author having abused, or even stretched to its utmost limits, the right of insurrectionary and anti-despotic declamation inseparable from the very nature of his subject, the impartial reader of "Alasco" might perhaps be justified in entertaining grave doubts as to the bias of the author's personal opinions, on the lawfulness of armed resistance to constituted authority, even under the pressure of an aggravated and anti-national system of tyranny. If, on the one hand, language characteristic of a man conscientiously engaged, from a motive of patriotism and duty, in a struggle for the recovery of national independence, is put in the mouth of the hero, Alasco, in connection with a highly

honourable and chivalrous tone of feeling and sentiment; on the other, the advocates of loyal and dutiful submission to every established order of government, may find in the character of Walsingham, a no less respectable and dignified representative of their favourite theory, supporting his views with a vigour of declamation, and an argumentative energy, that cannot be said to yield in power or effect, to the most emphatic bursts of insurrectionary enthusiasm that are to be found in the antagonistic *rôle*. But perhaps the following extract from the author's preface to the work as published, will more satisfactorily explain, as it certainly describes with perfect accuracy, his mode of dealing with the opposite principles of action in political matters, which he has endeavoured to bring into vigorous collision, and place in strong dramatic contrast.

"As I proposed, in the character of Alasco, to give an example of public as well as private virtue, it was necessary to make him a patriot, and to place him in circumstances calculated to call forth the noblest passion of man, the love of his country. But he is a patriot according to the old-established standard — made up by the regular prescription approved of in all ages. He is no jacobinical sprout from the luxuriant stem of diseased philosophy — no factious demagogue, railing himself into vulgar repute, that he may enhance the value of the virulence which he means to bring to market. He is no leveller of rank and degree — no political enthusiast, seeking for a new era of human felicity in a community of goods, or the panacea of an agrarian law; — he is a nobleman of high spirit and honourable feelings, indignant at the ruin of his country, and ready to sacrifice his life and his love in her defence; unwilling, however, to rouse the inert and sluggish mass of his fellow-sufferers to an exertion, which must be always premature, when not spontaneous; reluctant to disturb the torpid tranquillity of those who can be content to slumber in the noxious shade of despotism. In the part

of Walsingham, I have attempted to draw the character of a brave, loyal, and generous soldier, distinguished by the noblest sentiments that can be generated in a high-minded reverence for his ancient race, sacrificing all considerations to an exalted sense of duty, estimating loyalty to his sovereign as the paramount virtue of a soldier, and displaying a proud sense of honour which, I trust, will not be considered unworthy of the nation to which his name has assigned him.

"In contrasting these two characters, I was desirous to show that virtuous minds may take opposite views of the most important objects — that we may differ on religion and politics without meriting acrimonious censure or malignant interpretation; and that as long as our lives are exemplary and our actions upright, our motives should be judged with candour, and even our prejudices respected." Preface to *Alasco*, p. xxxiii.

Such being the nature and character of the work, as designed by the author, it may well be imagined that, whatever misgivings he entertained as to its literary merit or dramatic success, he was wholly unprepared to find it an object of political apprehension, or a mark for official proscription; and it may be safely assumed, that, but for the accident of a recent change in the *personnel* of the department, which superintends the proprieties and controls the excesses of the stage, "Alasco" would have been quietly allowed to make its own way with a hostile or sympathising audience, free from compulsory curtailments and unaccused, as unsuspected, of fanning the smouldering embers of popular discontent, among the enlightened politicians of the gallery, or inciting to seditious courses, or even speculative republicanism, a single barber's apprentice on the critical benches of the pit.

It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that all dramatic representations in England, are under the absolute control, and subject to the despotic authority of the

Lord Chamberlain (for the time being) of the Royal Household, who, as *conservator morum*, excludes from the stage such works, or portions of works, as he may, from time to time, consider to be, either from permanent or merely temporary causes, injurious to public tranquillity, or offensive to public morals. No dramatic work can be produced for the first time, on any stage, without the express sanction of this high functionary; and, as it would be a very serious and unreasonable aggravation of the official labours which devolve on him in the ordinary discharge of his dignified and ornamental duties, were he obliged personally to inspect and criticise the manuscript of every new tragedy, comedy, and farce in preparation at any one of the numerous metropolitan and provincial theatres in England, — the task of official revision and dramatic censorship is vicariously performed, by a permanent officer in the Lord Chamberlain's department, who, under the title of the Deputy Licenser or Examiner of Plays, devotes his time and attention to the dreary, and probably rather drowsy, employment in question, in consideration of which he receives a salary of some hundreds per annum.

This snug appointment had been, for a period of twenty years or upwards, — and until within a few weeks of the time fixed for the production of "Alasco," — held with perfect satisfaction to the dramatic world, and complete security to our institutions, by a gentleman of the name of Larpent, whose mild and benignant sway was unmarked by any severe or arbitrary exercise of his formidable authority, and during whose tenure of the office, its active interference, on grounds of political susceptibility, was a contingency scarcely within the contemplation of dramatist or manager. Assuredly, the author of "Alasco," guiltless as he was

of any design against the Constitution, and unconscious of any heretical deviation from the orthodox standard of public opinion, in dealing with those principles of civil and religious liberty which are the pride and boast of our country, felt no apprehension, and, under the Larpent dynasty, would have incurred no risk of official censure or prohibition, in reference to the subject or language of the tragedy in question. The death of Mr. Larpent, however, which occurred about the end of the year 1823, and during the time when "Alasco" was in rehearsal at Covent Garden Theatre, preparatory to its representation early in the ensuing year, created a vacancy in the office of Deputy Licenser; and the individual selected to succeed him in that appointment, had been very recently gazetted and installed, when the manuscript stage copy of "Alasco" was submitted for his official sanction. If I mistake not, it was the first dramatic work on whose destinies the new deputy had to try "his 'prentice hand."

An appointment involving the performance of duties so important to the interests of the drama, would seem to belong, almost of right, to the community of letters; as affording a comfortable, if not a handsome provision for one of the many distinguished members of the profession, the measure of whose worldly prosperity is but little in harmony with the extent and *éclat* of their literary reputation: and it may fairly be said that the worthy nobleman who then filled the office of Lord Chamberlain,—the late Duke of Montrose,—in selecting for his critical *locum tenens* the most brilliant social wit, and one of the most popular and successful dramatists of his day,—George Colman the younger,—paid a just tribute to talents which, however unfortunately

perverted in some deplorable instances to purposes of ribaldry and licentiousness, have secured to their possessor, a conspicuous and permanent place in the literary annals of his country, in right of more than one work of sterling merit, alike unobjectionable in moral tone, and admirable in point of dialogue and dramatic effect.

It must, however, be admitted, that the name of the author of "Broad Grins," in connection with the office of dramatic censor, was rather suggestive of merriment to the literary world at large, than calculated to excite, among dramatic circles, any fear of a more rigorous application of the prohibitive authority vested in the Deputy Licenser, than had signalised the mild rule of his immediate predecessor. But whether it was that, in his peculiar idiosyncrasy, an indulgent latitudinarianism of views in matters of social morality and decency, was compensated by an over-sensitive solicitude on the score of political error and impropriety,—or that, on obtaining the appointment, he had received from his official superiors some intimation of a desire for the exercise of a more active and discriminating vigilance than had theretofore been considered necessary, in detecting the fatal spirit of treasonable malignity, through the specious veil of dramatic proprieties, or under the insidious forms of abstract philosophy and patriotic sentiment,—Mr. Colman would appear to have set about his critical perusal of "Alasco" with an intensity of expurgative zeal, and a pious horror of lurking liberalism, more suited to the political meridian of Naples or St. Petersburgh, than to the pure and healthy atmosphere of public opinion in England.

To the surprise and dismay of the manager, the manuscript of "Alasco" was returned to him, in due

official course, with such copious and damaging erasures in red ink, from the pen of the Deputy Licenser, as amounted to irremediable mutilations of the most effective scenes, and practical annihilation of the peculiar characteristics of language and sentiment, by which the author had sought to individualise the principal personages of his play. Every word or phrase suggestive of public rights or national independence—every allusion to tyranny, despotism, or arbitrary power,—was evidently a scandal and an offence in the eyes of the over-zealous functionary, who would seem to have considered authority in the abstract,—and even when existing under conditions and circumstances incompatible with, and wholly repugnant to, the principles of our own constitutional system,—as entitled to a species of religious reverence, and surrounded with a halo of wisdom, virtue, and sanctity, which it would be profanity to investigate with too penetrating a gaze, and sacrilege to seek to dispel.

That this is no exaggerated description of the spirit exhibited in the Deputy Licenser's erasures will, I think, be admitted by the reader, when he is informed that among the passages subjected to this stern process of proscription, are to be found the following, viz.:—

"With most unworthy patience have I seen
My country shackled and her sons oppress'd,
And tho' I've felt their injuries, and avow
My ardent hope hereafter to avenge them," &c.
Act 1, *Sc.* 3.

"Tyrants, proud lord, are never safe, nor should be;
The ground is mined beneath them as they tread;
Haunted by plots, cabals, conspiracies,
Their lives are long convulsions, and they shake,
Surrounded by their guards and garrisons." *Ibid.*

"Some sland'rous tool of state,
Some taunting, dull, unmanner'd deputy." *Ibid.*

The word "despot" in the following line:

"Some district *despot*, prompt to play the Tarquin." *Ibid.*

"Our country's wrongs unite us."
Act 3, *Sc.* 1.

The whole of the following speech, except the first line:

"Ask you my grievance?—'tis my country's ruin.
What! is't because I live and breathe at large—
Can eat, drink, sleep, and move unmanacled,
That I should calmly view my country's wrongs!
For what are we styled noble, and endowed
With pomp and privilege?
For what thus raised above our fellow creatures,
And fed like Gods on incense, but to show
Superior worth — pre-eminence of virtue!
To guard, with holy zeal, the people's rights,
And stand firm bulwarks 'gainst the tide of power,
When rushing to o'erwhelm them." *Ibid.*

"Had fear or feeling sway'd against redress
Of public wrong, man never had been free;
The thrones of tyrants had been fixed as fate,
And slavery seal'd the universal doom. *Ibid.*

The words in italics in the following passage:

"'Tis ours to rescue from the oblivious grave,
Where tyrants have combined to bury them,
A gallant race—a nation—*and her fame;*
To gather up the fragments of our state,
And in its cold, dismember'd body, breathe
The living soul of empire." *Act* 4, *Sc.* 2.

In one place, the religious susceptibilities of the licenser appear to have taken alarm at an expression

in the mouth of the loyal and chivalrous Walsingham, which might perhaps have been deemed indecorously latitudinarian, if uttered by the Archbishop of Canterbury in full convocation, or introduced in an "Allocution" from the Vatican; but could hardly be considered as more than venially reprehensible, from the lips of a Protestant soldier. In recalling with tenderness the memory of his deceased wife, Walsingham says :—

"In creed we differ'd—
It was our only difference, and her zeal
Dreaded a father's influence with Amantha.
But I was never skill'd in controversy.
Fear God, and love the king—the soldier's faith—
Was always my religion; and I know
No heretics but cowards, knaves, and traitors.
No, no, whate'er the colour of his creed,
The man of honour's orthodox."

In this passage, the sentence now printed in italics was piously expunged by the licenser. Upon what definite principle it is difficult to say; for the three preceding lines are as clearly, and, to the full, as emphatically, opposed to a strict severity of view in dogmatic theology, and, if possible, indicate a still more alarming stretch of disedifying tolerance.

These few extracts will suffice to show the nature and character of the critical *animus* which was brought to bear on the pages of "Alasco;" and, in the absence of all information as to the secret causes which incited the new licenser to so eccentric a manifestation of zeal, the official mutilation inflicted on that luckless play, must be considered as one of the unexplained and unexplainable phenomena of literary history.

One thing is certain, viz., that the proceeding was in no way attributable to any feeling of hostility towards the author, of whose name, as such, Mr. Colman was unquestionably ignorant, when the play was submitted to his examination. In the preface Mr. Shee distinctly avowed his conviction on this point, in the concluding passages, which I here insert, as affording a creditable instance of the candour and moderation which marked his literary demeanour towards one who had most absurdly at least, though, it would seem, not malignantly, inflicted upon him what, as a dramatic author, he could not but feel, at the time, as a serious injury.

"In the observations which I have here thought it my duty to make, I have avoided all reference to the gentleman who fills the office of Licenser or Examiner of Plays, except in his official character. In this matter I know him only as a public officer, by whose act I conceive myself to be aggrieved. It is but justice to him to state, that no personal feeling towards me could have influenced his conduct on the present occasion. My name, as the author of 'Alasco,' was communicated only to Mr. Kemble; and there can be no doubt that my secret was safe in his honourable keeping.

"Whether the new licenser be the person who can most becomingly put in force the utmost rigour of the authority with which he is invested, is a question which I shall not voluntarily discuss. Its decision could not alter my case, even though it were to aggravate his; and if he shall be thought to have done his duty, I do not desire to detract from his merit by retrospective scrutiny, or irrelevant accusation."

On receiving from Mr. Kemble the unexpected announcement of the official condemnation of "Alasco," Mr. Shee felt it due to himself, not to submit, in silent acquiescence, to so insulting an exercise of authority;

and in the delusive hope that the capricious and absurd sentence, pronounced by the indiscreet deputy, might be taken into personal consideration, and ultimately revoked, by his more dignified, and perhaps more reasonable superior, he immediately addressed and sent to the Duke of Montrose, a letter avowing the authorship of the proscribed work, and containing a forcible appeal to His Grace, in his official capacity, against the injustice to which it had been subjected at the hands of the licenser. The subjoined extracts are sufficiently illustrative of the tone and spirit that pervade this emphatic, though temperate remonstrance :—

"Conscious of the purity of my intentions, and convinced of the unexceptionable character of my work, my surprise was great, when I found it contained sentiments which the official guardian of these great interests, as far as the stage is concerned, had thought it necessary to suppress.

"This is an imputation, my lord, to which it is impossible I can silently submit. I owe it to my own character, as a subject of the government under which I live, — as a member of the respectable institution to which I have the honour to belong, and to my station in which I have had the honour to be raised by diploma from its royal and venerable founder, — I owe it to the interests of my family, and the preservation of my good name, not to acquiesce in a decision which would attempt to stamp me as the factious propagator of principles calculated to produce such dangerous consequences to the political institutions of this free country, as required so harsh and unusual an interposition of your Grace's authority, to prevent. As I have reason to believe that your Grace has not seen the production in question, I am bound, in the first instance, to appeal to your wisdom and justice, against the judgment of your deputy. Your Grace's liberality will not deem the time misemployed, which may enable you to judge of the policy and propriety of his agency on this occasion, — which may enable you to correct it, if

it should be considered erroneous, or to sanction it, if it should be deemed just. I ask no favour at your Grace's hands. Obscure an individual as I am, I am neither so unknown nor so unfriended, but that I might hope to gain admission to your Grace, through the interference of those whose influence might favourably present my claims to your attention; but I should be sorry to seek by solicitation, that redress to which the integrity of my intentions and the justice of my cause give me a more honourable claim. I appeal to your Grace, as to a great public officer, anxious to discharge, with liberality and sound discretion, the duties which his exalted station prescribes — duties in which are involved the interests of literature, and the very existence of the drama, as an object of national pleasure or pride.

"If your Grace should honour me by perusing my play, you will find it a production which, however feeble as to its literary pretensions, I boldly assert contains not one sentiment, moral, religious, or political, of which an honest subject of this empire can justly disapprove, or which any honourable man, of any party, should be ashamed to avow. You will find it a production in which there is not one sentiment, one line, or one word, disrespectful to kings, or unfavourable to monarchy or legitimate government of any description. You will find it a production in which, neither in intention nor expression, neither by allusion nor implication, is there the slightest attempt to call in question, censure, or satirise the government, constitution, or laws of this country,—to throw any discredit on its institutions, or cast the least aspersion on those who are concerned in their administration. On the contrary, your Grace will find, in that production, an humble, but honest endeavour, in every page, to inculcate the practice of public and private virtue. You will find many passages which advocate a high-minded reverence for royal authority. You will find the virtue of loyalty, in particular, and the fidelity of a soldier to his sovereign, exemplified and illustrated in the noblest character of an officer and an Englishman, which it was in the power of the author's imagination to conceive, and expressed in language which may indeed be easily excelled in poetical power, but which, I will venture

to say, for integrity of intention, and dramatic good faith, has never been surpassed."

This remonstrance, it need hardly be said, experienced the usual fate of appeals to official power against the vicarious abuse of its functions on the part of a subordinate instrument of its authority.

The Lord Chamberlain acknowledged the receipt of Mr. Shee's letter in the following courteous, but rather illogical reply, from which the main fact to be collected would seem to be his grace's cordial adhesion to the principle embodied in the well-known Irish proverb, which satirises the absurdity of "*keeping a dog and barking one's self.*"

"Grosvenor Square, 19th February, 1824.

"SIR,— Thinking Mr. Colman a very sufficient judge of his duty, and as I agree in his conclusion (from the account he has given me of the tragedy called 'Alasco'), I do conclude, that at this time, without considerable omissions, the tragedy should not be acted; and whilst I am persuaded that your intentions are upright, I conceive that it is precisely for this reason (though it may not strike authors) that it has been the wisdom of the Legislature to have an examiner appointed, and power given to the Chamberlain of the Household to judge whether certain plays should be acted at all, or not acted at particular times.

"I do not mean to enter into an argument with you, Sir, on the subject; but think that your letter, conceived in polite terms to me, calls upon me to return an answer, showing that your tragedy has been well considered.

"I remain, Sir, with esteem,

"Your obedient servant,

"MONTROSE.

"Martin Archer Shee, Esq., &c. &c. &c."

In answer to this communication, Mr. Shee immediately addressed the following letter to his grace:

"Cavendish Square, Thursday, February 19, 1824.

"MY LORD DUKE,—I have this day received your Grace's answer to the appeal which I had the honour to address to your Grace respecting the tragedy of 'Alasco,' and I beg leave respectfully to offer my acknowledgments for the promptitude and politeness with which your Grace's decision has been communicated to me.

"I considered myself bound, in a matter so important to my honour and my interest, to address your Grace in your official capacity, conceiving that the Lord Chamberlain, before he gave his sanction to so harsh and injurious a measure as that which has excluded my tragedy from the stage, might possibly think it his duty to resort to some other criterion of its demerits, than the report of the officer whose judgment was called in question before him. Your Grace's official reply has undeceived me in this particular, and renders it improper for me to trespass farther on your Grace's time and attention, than by the respectful intimation that I propose, in due time, to submit my appeal, with your Grace's answer, to the inspection of the public.

"I have the honour to be,
"With the most profound respect,
"My Lord Duke,
"Your Grace's most obedient
"And most humble servant,
"MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

"His Grace the Duke of Montrose, &c. &c."

The Lord Chamberlain's refusal to interfere with the decision of his deputy, having precluded all hope of official redress, the author's only alternative was to appeal to the more impartial judgment of the public. In the meantime, the fact of the withdrawal of the forthcoming tragedy, in deference to the licenser's scruples, having been communicated to the daily papers, Mr. Shee had, through the same medium, publicly avowed the authorship of the proscribed work.

This announcement, as may well be supposed, created

considerable sensation in the circles of literature, and indeed among the public at large; nor were the chief organs of the press backward in bearing their testimony to the talents and high character of the aggrieved author, by expressing their disappointment at the withdrawal of his play, and avowing their utter incredulity, as to the dangerous tendencies which the distorted vision of over-zealous official scrutiny, had contrived to discover in its plan or details. The following letter, addressed to Miss Tunno, was written apparently in reply to some anxious and friendly inquiries suggested to her by the appearance, in one of the newspapers, of a paragraph identifying Mr. Shee with the author of the supposed drama.

"Cavendish Square, February 21st, 1824.

. . . . . .

"You have seen, my dear Miss Tunno, that I am at length *found out;*—that I have been *detected,* as the lawyers say, *in flagranti delicto.* . . . . . A new popish plot has been discovered, by the precautionary police of the Lord Chamberlain's office, and *I* am the new Guy Faux that was about to blow up the King and the Parliament. May I expect, from the magnanimous generosity of your nature, a similar favour to that which once cheered that arch-enemy of *official man,* Cobbett, in the gloomy cells of his incarceration — will you bless me with your presence, when I am in *durance vile?* Will you once more brighten the purlieus of Newgate, — where, alas! 'angels' visits' are 'few and far between,'—and administer some comfort to an unhappy dramatic culprit, who has been rescued from damnation on the stage, to experience a nobler discomfiture, and be immolated on the altar of state policy and ministerial indignation? I can perceive, my most amiable friend, that under the surface of the security which you express, there are some sly suspicions in your mind that *Pat* has been rather *naughty* on the occasion; that, aware of the intemperance and indiscretion with which he commonly gives vent to his feelings.

you think it not unlikely that, with so many just causes for indignation, he may have rashly probed too deep the public sore. But what will be your *alarm* when I tell you that, whatever may be my delinquencies, I claim *you* as the *accomplice* of my misdeeds — yes, as the *original instigator* of my offence;— when I confess that, in the most quiescent state of literary inaction, I dozed on, thoughtless of theatres, tyrants, and Lord Chamberlains, when you touched me with the magic wand of your influence, and roused me to the irresistible perpetration of that tragic atrocity for which I am now brought to condign punishment. But to stop the flood of folly, before it entirely overflows my paper, let me tell you in sober seriousness, my excellent friend, that you have been *really* and *truly* the cause of this formidable dramatic assault on all constituted authorities. You don't remember, perhaps, quite as well as I do, that you once sat to me for your portrait, and that in one of the many delightful conversations which the operation of painting it, procured for me, you asked me *why I did not write a tragedy.* At that moment, the spark was struck that has occasioned the present explosion. In some of the papers of Monday or Tuesday next you may, perhaps, find a proof that, however I may have discredited your inspiration by poetical delinquency, I have not disgraced it by religious, moral, or political offence.* In one respect, I confess, I am bitterly disappointed at this unforeseen discomfiture of my *plot;* for I can truly say that one of the most stimulating pleasures that occurred to me in its prosecution, was the hope that the favourable reception of my tragedy on the stage, would have enabled and authorised me, as a public testimony of my respect, regard, and admiration, to dedicate it to *her* who had suggested its composition. But this, like most of the agreeable visions of my life, has vanished into air. I would not insult you by connecting your name, in any way, with a work which has been thought to deserve official reprobation."

* This probably refers to his intention of sending to the newspapers a copy of his correspondence with the Lord Chamberlain, of which the foregoing extracts form a part,—a course which he accordingly adopted.

Within a few days after the papers had given publicity to an event so unusual in the dramatic annals of our time, an application was made to Mr. Shee, by a gentleman of the name of Vaux, for the purchase of the copyright of "Alasco," with a view to its immediate publication; and after a short negotiation the sum of 500*l.* was agreed upon as the price, in consideration of which, the author was to make over his interest in the work. The purchaser was not, as might be supposed, a publisher by trade, but a gentleman connected with, and interested in the proprietorship of the "European Magazine," who, as a private speculator, was willing to undertake the risk and expense of publishing a work concerning which he believed the public to entertain so high a degree of curiosity, as could not fail to ensure for it a large and remunerating sale. Had the publication taken place with the rapidity which was clearly practicable, and which a prudent appreciation of the evanescent nature of all sudden and temporary excitement in the literary world, on similar occasions, should have urgently suggested to those who undertook the duty of bringing out the work,—it is highly probable that the expectations which had prompted the purchase would have been fully realised. Although the play, as printed, was of very unusual length, containing, according to a statement of the author, which accompanied the publication, "nearly one thousand lines more than could be admitted within the usual limits of an acting play;"—and therefore comprising, in addition to the officially proscribed passages, a very considerable portion of text, the omission of which, in the representation had been decided upon between the author and the manager, for the purposes of necessary curtailment,—there can be no doubt, that a due amount of typogra-

phic energy brought to bear on the subject, could have secured the appearance of the work within a week or ten days after the public announcement of the circumstances which had rendered it an object of peculiar interest. The purchaser of the copyright, however, committed the great mistake of allowing nearly six weeks to elapse before the tragedy was ready for delivery to the booksellers; and in the interval, a good deal of that spirit of eager curiosity with which the appearance of "Alasco," as the victim of official rigour, was originally expected, had already evaporated; and other topics of interest had supervened, to engross or divert public attention.

This seemingly unaccountable delay was, I believe, attributable not to negligence or accident, but to a system of erroneous policy, with regard to interests extraneous to, or at least, not wholly identical with, the fate of "Alasco" itself. The management of the "European Magazine" had recently passed into new hands, and was now under the direction of a gentleman of high attainments and considerable literary talent. Great efforts were made, on the part of the proprietors, to attract public notice to this periodical, which had not theretofore enjoyed a very extensive circulation; and it was considered that the circumstances connected with the dramatic suppression of "Alasco," and its appearance in print, afforded a favourable opportunity for an article that might arrest the attention of the critical and literary world. With this view, it was arranged that the publication of the play should be delayed until within a short period of the beginning of April, in order that the review of that work might appear in the number of the "European Magazine" for that month, and, as it was hoped, at a moment when the public interest in the fate of "Alasco"

and the general curiosity to ascertain the alleged grounds of its condemnation, might be at their highest.

This attempt to effect, at once, two objects so distinct in character, — in the prosecution of which, the success of the tragedy as a literary work was in reality, though perhaps unconsciously, on the part of the persons engaged in its publication, sacrificed to the supposed interests of the periodical in which it was to be reviewed, was a decided failure. "Alasco," as published, attracted but very little attention, beyond what was bestowed on the political bearing of the passages which, in official estimation, constituted its delinquency, and the "European Magazine" received no perceptible impulse of increased popularity or circulation, from the elaborate and able review of the tragedy which made its all but simultaneous appearance in the pages of that periodical.

Nor was the dilatory publication of "Alasco," the sole error in worldly policy ascribable to the mode in which it was presented to the reader. To have printed the play *verbatim*, from the stage copy, and exactly as it stood when submitted to the ruthless pen of the deputy licenser, would have been amply sufficient for the author's vindication; while the public might have been judiciously left to conjecture, as to the particular passages which had excited the loyal and pious fears of the official censor. In this there would have been no unfairness to Mr. Colman, and no misrepresentation of facts, on the part of Mr. Shee. Under such circumstances, however, to judge of the case as between the author and the licenser, who had declared the representation of the play, in its integral state, to be politically dangerous, it would have been necessary to read it through; and in order to enable the public at large to exercise that discriminative judgment, founded on

such conscientious perusal, the sale of the book must have been extensive. But it was far more consonant to the feelings of Mr. Shee, and more consistent with his open and straightforward character, to put the public in full possession of the case, in all its details and bearings; nor did he probably undervalue the opportunity afforded of appending to the condemned passages, some annotations by way of comment, in which he might well be pardoned for indulging, by turns, in contemptuous ridicule, and caustic severity, towards his over scrupulous censor.

In "Alasco," as published, therefore, the printer duly pointed out, and distinguished by italics, every speech, line, sentence, and word, through which the licenser had struck his merciless pen. The consequence was that, on the day after its publication, every morning paper paraded in one column, and presented at one view to the public, the whole body of officially expunged matter. This simple process was, from the obviously unobjectionable nature of the extracted passages, abundantly sufficient to convince the public of Mr. Colman's absurdity and Mr. Shee's freedom from political offence; but it proved equally effective in satiating their curiosity as to the contents of the long forthcoming tragedy. The author had in the first instance appealed to the Lord Chamberlain, and in the second place to the public;—and as the former had condemned him, so the latter absolved him, alike *unread.*

It has been seen that, in the letter inserted a few pages back, Mr. Shee, while stating his purpose of dedicating "Alasco" on its publication, to Miss Tunno, had abandoned that design out of delicacy to one whose name he was unwilling to compromise, by con-

necting it with a publication under the ban of official proscription. His fair and accomplished correspondent, however, having, with unmistakeable sincerity, disclaimed all feeling of apprehension, on the score of the social or political discredit that might attach to an inferential sympathy with the author's sentiments, involved in the appearance of her name in the dedication of the work,—and expressed her unwillingness to dispense with the gratifying evidence of the author's just respect and regard, which its inscription to her would supply, Mr. Shee was induced to recur to his original intention. The following letter was therefore prefixed to "Alasco," on its appearance in print:—

"*To Miss Tunno, Taplow Lodge, Bucks.*

"My dear Madam,—It was at your suggestion I first conceived the idea of writing a tragedy. I have, therefore, some claim to be allowed the liberty which I now take in thus publicly addressing to you the following attempt in that species of composition.

"I should, perhaps, hesitate to offer to you a production which makes its appearance under the discredit of official censure, if I did not know that, to all the gentler virtues and graces which can adorn your own sex, you add the firmness which belongs to ours. 'Alasco' will not find less favour in your eyes because he is an object of persecution.

"If, under the impulse which you communicated, I have been guilty of offence, it will have been the first instance in which your influence has failed to rectify the spirit over which it was exercised, or to purify what it inspired.

"Your taste will, I fear, find as little to commend in the poetical, as your candour will have to reprove in the moral qualities of my work. Your kindness, however, will accept it with indulgence, as a testimony of the respect, regard, and

admiration which your virtues, your talents, and your acquirements have excited in,

"My dear Madam,

"Your most sincerely devoted, and obliged friend and servant,

"MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

"Cavendish Square, March, 1824."

It is unnecessary to enter here into any general discussion of the literary merits or defects of "Alasco;" nor would a dry detail of its plot or incidents possess much interest for the reader. Many a poem which assumes a dramatic form, rather affects the praise due to fanciful and picturesque illustration, glowing imagery, and harmonious versification,—than aspires to the more strictly appropriate merits of histrionic effect, rapid and well-sustained action, and salient individuality of character. The pleasure afforded by such works, is not very perceptibly distinct from that which we experience in reading any versified tale presented to us in the regular form of narration, and legitimately used as a vehicle for digressive flights of imagination, or graphic and highly wrought descriptions of the mild or terrible beauties of inanimate nature. In such cases, extracts may be easily laid before the reader, which convey a tolerably adequate idea of the general tenor and distinctive merits of the entire work. But "Alasco" is a play written essentially for the stage, and elaborated, according to the measure of the author's skill, and the bias of his theories, with a constant and unswerving view to dramatic fitness, and strong scenic effect. The chief merits of the dialogue, therefore, are dependent on its peculiar adaptation to the incidents that arise, and the characters that are developed, in the course of the action. Smooth and flowing in versification, and vigorous in thought and diction, according

to the personal attributes of the speaker, or the natural exigences of the situation, it contains but few passages of sustained poetical feeling, or boldly figurative display. Such, indeed, would have been generally out of place, amid the rapid movement of a plot which leaves the principal characters but scanty leisure for digressive remark, or philosophical reflection.

There is, however, a somewhat episodical scene, in which the heroine, in agonising apprehension as to the fate of her husband and her father, who are represented as having taken arms, on opposite sides, in the civil conflict then at its height, relates to the Prior of the Convent a dream which had disturbed her mind on the previous night. This narration appears to me to contain some passages of much descriptive power; and as, from the nature of the subject, it is capable of being detached and appreciated as a whole, irrespectively of the fable with which it is connected, I am tempted to insert it in this place.

AMANTHA.

"Last night—
Last night, I saw my mother in my sleep!
If sleep it can be called, which seem'd in consciousness,
Intense and quick as waking agony.
Nay, start not as incredulous, but hear!
A close, half whispering motion at my side,
Dispersed the vague and shadowy forms that roll
In slumber's common chaos, and appear'd
As summoning all the evidence of sense,
To mark, with thrilling eagerness and awe,
An agency more real and mysterious.
Instant, in breathless terror as I lay,
My mother's sainted image stood before me—
Clear as in life—so plain—so palpable,—

Had I the power to move I could have touch'd her.
With pale and pitcous aspect she beheld me,
And laid her wither'd hand upon my heart.
O! God! the chill that shiver'd through my frame
From that cold hand!

JEROME.

And can a dream, my child,
Have power to move you thus?

AMANTHA.

A dream—but hear!
A moment fix'd, she stood, and gazed upon me,
With looks of woe and pity past all utterance;
Then, bending forward, press'd her clammy lips
To mine. She spoke—I heard her well-known voice;
But though her words seem'd whispering in my ear,
And all my soul stretch'd gasping for their purport,
I caught no sound articulate of speech.
She then, with solemn action, motioned me
To rise and follow her;—compelled by some
Resistless impulse, I obeyed: she led
Through lonely avenues and gloomy groves—
O'er wild and waste, through dismal church-yard paths,
Where moaning winds and muttering sounds of night
Make up the talk of tombs: at length a grave—
A yawning grave before me—stopped our course,
And showed, half buried in its loathsome jaws,
Two desperate men, with most unhallowed rage,
Contending o'er the uncoffined corse within.
Fiercely they fought; and each, with frantic hand,
Snatched from the mouldering fragments of the dead,
His weapon of assault and sacrilege,
In fiend-like profanation. All aghast,
I turned me, shuddering, from the hideous sight,
To seek my mother's shade;—but she had vanished;
'Twas then I felt, her presence, which before
Appalled me, had been now a refuge to me,

And I seemed lost in losing it. Again—
I fearful turned to that dread spectacle;
It was my mother's grave!—the uncoffined corse
Was her's: the furious men—O God! I saw,
In those ferocious—frantic—fiend-like men,
Who tore her sacred relics from the earth,
My father and my husband!—Powers of mercy!

JEROME.

Be calm, be calm, my child!

AMANTHA.

At sight of me,
Though writhing—raging in each other's grasp,
They ceased their horrid strife, and both at once,
Combining all their wrath, rushed forth to seize me.
I gasped—I struggled—but my cries gave out
No sound—my limbs, benumbed and powerless, seemed
As life had left them;—with united strength,
They dragged me down to that dark cave of death,
Where my poor parent lay, and were about
To close me in for ever;—when despair,
In one wild shriek of horror, burst its way
From out my quivering lips, and left me senseless.
Returning reason found me in my chamber,
Exhausted—weak—and wondering at my safety.

JEROME.

O! my poor child! regard not these illusions.—
Disturbed by life's events, our minds, in sleep,
Work out most strange chimeras of the brain,
And all we suffer mix with all we fear,
In combinations wild and monstrous.

AMANTHA.

Ay—
I know what 'tis to dream;—to whirl and toss
In the wild chaos of distempered sleep;—

To pant and suffocate in horrid strife,
Shaking the monster night-mare from the breast.
I have been pursued by goblins—hideous forms,
Agape to swallow me; I have breathless hung
Upon the slippery verge of some vast precipice,
And, sliding down, have grasped, in thrilling agony,
Some slender twig, or crumbling fragment there,
To save me from the yawning gulf below.—
But such a dream as this I have not known,
So stamp'd with truth—so certified to sense—
So charactered in all that marks to man,
Life's waking dreams from sleep's close counterfeit.
I tell thee, father, such a dream might well
Disturb the tests of strong reality,—
Confound the forms and substances of things;
Astonish Truth herself with her own attributes,
And shake the heart of daring incredulity.

JEROME.

All, all, the wild creation of your fears—
The idle phantoms of a feverish brain,
Rejected by religion as by reason."

Alasco, Act 4, Sc. 3.

I have already intimated that the official aspersion cast on "Alasco," was not acquiesced in by the judgment of the literary and critical world, who failed to discover in any of the numerous passages which had excited the repressive ire of the licenser, the slightest taint of treason, sedition, or blasphemy. This general statement, however, requires a slight qualification; the unanimity of the verdict being subject to one notable exception.

One of the leading periodicals of the day, conspicuous alike for the highest degree of literary talent, and the utmost virulence of political rancour, denounced this formidable dramatic delinquency, as the result of a

deep laid plot against social order and security, connected with and directly subservient to a scheme for the revolutionising of Ireland, and the extirpation of *Protestantism* from that unhappy country! It chanced that nearly about the time when "Alasco" made its appearance, — but whether before or after I do not recollect, — Moore published his "*Memoirs* of *Captain Rock*," — a politico-historical satire of considerable bitterness, designed, of course, to call the attention of the British public to the misgovernment of Ireland.

The mutual relation between the spirit of this work and the design and tendency of "Alasco," is about as easy of discovery, as the logical or metaphysical affinity between Tenterden Steeple and Goodwin Sands; but to the jealous eye of Irish ultra-toryism,—then engaged in a last and desperate struggle to defend and maintain the exclusive laws which denied the privileges of their birthright to five-sixths of the Irish people, — every allusion to national wrongs or grievances seemed, no doubt, an indirect censure on the policy which sought to perpetuate the degradation of so large a body of the king's subjects, and fan the fires of religious dissension into a flame, in the hope of thereby obtaining a pretext for still more unjust and oppressive legislation.

Among the foremost of the literary combatants engaged in this patriotic and pious warfare, "Blackwood's Magazine" occupied a distinguished place; and although its flag was displayed, and its batteries were ostensibly opened, from the head-quarters at Edinburgh, all those most experienced in the niceties of the "practice" could detect the eye and hand of Irish rancour, in the pointing of the guns, and the unscrupulous spirit of Irish malignity, in the choice and use of the ammunition. In the number of "Blackwood's Magazine" for May 1824,

there appeared an article in the shape of a letter from "Timothy Tickler," under the title of "*Pike Prose and Poetry*," in which the author of "Alasco" is openly, —I will not say *seriously*,—charged with being in a league with the author of "Captain Rock," in his nefarious designs against the tranquillity and the Protestantism of Ireland. The passages cited from the text of the play in support of this accusation, and the commentaries of the reviewer thereon, taken in conjunction, supply some of the choicest "Curiosities of Criticism" that have ever been excogitated for the enlightenment of the literary world. The following example will probably suffice to give the reader a correct notion of the style and spirit in which "Alasco" was dealt with.

The first scene introduces Conrad, a leader of the insurgents, dismissing his undisciplined troops after a nightly drill, by means of which he is preparing them for the intended outbreak. In so doing, he addresses a few words of repressive caution to his little force — evidently intended as an *avis au lecteur* to the traitors of Tipperary,—as will appear from the following lines, which the reviewer cites, emphasizing the words of exhortation in ominous capitals, and unmasking the felonious meaning in the accompanying comment.

CONRAD.

"Though your wrongs are throbbing at your hearts,
Repress the impatient spirit, and AWAIT
THE HOUR OF VENGEANCE NOW SO NEAR AT HAND.

"This was written to be played in 1824. Pastorini, whose prophecies are more devoutly believed by the insurgents of Ireland than the Bible, assures his believers that heresy is to be rooted out of these kingdoms with fire and sword, with dreadful punishment and intolerable agony, in 1825. Shee, himself Irish and Catholic, well knew this."

Blackwood's Mag., May 1824, p. 595.

It seems probable that this allusion to "Pastorini" may be as new to the reader of these pages, unversed in the records of religious mysticism, as it certainly was to the author of "Alasco," whose general reading was indeed varied and extensive, but who, as may be supposed, was not particularly "well-up" in the heavy literature of Apocalyptic interpretation. The work apparently referred to in the above passage, is a bulky commentary on the Book of Revelation, — or, as it is generally called by Catholics, the Apocalypse, — from the pen of Bishop Walmesley, one of the Vicars Apostolic in England in the early part of the last century, who published his ingenious speculations under the pseudonym of Signor Pastorini. This right reverend commentator had,—with safer caution against the chances of contemporary refutation, than has been exhibited by a distinguished modern expounder of prophecy—fixed the year 1828 as the period which was destined to witness the destruction or extinction of heresy. The restriction of the prophecy to "these kingdoms," the "dreadful punishment" and "intolerable agony," are, if I mistake not, happy additions suggested by the inventive genius of the reviewer, and thrown in, by way of seasoning, in serving up the statement, which, in its unadorned and undoctored simplicity, would have been not only less palatable to the *gobe-mouches* of No-popery agitation, but incapable of being wrested into such portentous conformity with the occult sense of "Alasco."

From the topics involved in this critical assault on "Alasco"—so significant of politico-religious animosity —the transition is easy to the state of public opinion and feeling at the period referred to, as affecting the social position of that class of religionists in which Mr. Shee

was included, and that portion of the United Kingdom to which, by birth, early association, and ancestral tradition, he might be said more particularly to belong.

There was undoubtedly much in the aspect of public affairs, in the intermediate years between 1824 and 1829, which could not but powerfully interest, and, in a great degree, engross the attention of an Irish Catholic, whose fortunes and prospects were, so to speak, interwoven with the frame-work and *actualities* of English society. From the beginning of the century, when the separate legislative existence of Ireland was merged, by the Act of Union, in that of the united parliament, the question of Catholic emancipation had been debated with nearly annual regularity of discussion, in the House of Commons, and, at intervals, had greatly excited the public mind. During the war, indeed, its claims were often superseded, in the great arena of political conflict, by the pressure of interests more deeply affecting our nationality, as connected with the continental struggle for the independence of Europe, partially destroyed and everywhere imperilled by the successful ambition of Napoleon. But after the final restoration of peace in 1815, the Catholic Question, which had long afforded an effective rallying cry to the two great parties in the state, annually acquired additional importance, and, in the course of the ensuing ten years, assumed the most formidable dimensions in the eyes of the country.

That this rapid development of political power among the Irish Catholic body, was owing, in great measure, to the skill, intrepidity, and indomitable energy of one man, will now hardly be questioned by the most tenacious adherent of the party which still deplores his success, and anathematises his memory, and must be gratefully acknowledged by the Catholic, who feels that

to the talent and exertions of Daniel O'Connell, he is, under God, mainly indebted for the unrestricted enjoyment of his *status* as an Englishman, and his birthright as a *subject of* the Imperial crown. But, owing to the unfortunate policy which postponed all attempt to settle this momentous question, long after the ultimate concession of the principle in dispute had been foreseen, by all clear-sighted politicians, as an inevitable necessity,—the machinery by means of which O'Connell succeeded in consolidating the efforts and directing the simultaneous movements of his Catholic fellow-countrymen, in their struggle for civil and political equality, was necessarily maintained, year after year, at the price of continually increasing excitement; nor could it indeed be called into play, or kept up in active operation, without greatly aggravating, for the time, those evils of religious dissension and polemical acerbity, which the most enlightened advocates of emancipation sought to allay.

Thus, at the period of which I am now speaking, the normal state of no-popery feeling in English society had, for a time, given place to a more active and rancorous hostility to the creed of Catholics, often accompanied by illiberal and offensive misapprehension of their political views and moral principles. This feeling, aroused and perpetually stimulated, as it was, by the energetic proceedings and studiously intemperate language of Irish agitation, naturally exhibited its most striking development in reference to the Irish Catholics; the natural prejudice, so common in England against the sister country, adding a pungent zest to the *odium theologicum* with which the religion of the majority of its inhabitants was regarded. As a natural consequence of this state of things, society,—even in those highly polished circles, from whose conversation an instinctive

good taste and scrupulous refinement are generally successful in banishing all exciting subjects of discussion,—became widely and deeply tainted with the spirit of controversial and political animosity; and an Irish Catholic, moving in the social world of Protestant London, was not unfrequently exposed to the mortifying annoyance, of witnessing the fiercest conversational assaults on his religion and his country, under circumstances where indignant contradiction and bitter retort seemed the only alternative of a cowardly silence.

Of those who were occasionally called upon to encounter this minor species of *martyrdom*, Mr. Shee was, perhaps, among the most sensitively alive to its *desagrémens;* and no dispassionate mind, while reverting to that peculiar phase of public opinion in England, can, I think, fail to recognise in the position of a Catholic, at that period, embarked in an arduous profession, and experiencing the natural anxiety of a father, as to the future career of sons about to engage in the busy conflict of life, much that was calculated to depress and embitter the spirit least prone to despondency or dissension.

Few men, indeed, have ever been less justly chargeable with sectarian bigotry, or intolerance of conflicting opinions on the momentous interests of religion, than the subject of this biography. The tendency of his mind led him rather to promote, by precept and example, the practical results of Christian doctrine, in the details of our daily life, than to dwell on the subtler distinctions of dogmatic theology. For angry polemics, or controversial discussion of the sublime mysteries of our faith, he had little taste or vocation; although his extensive reading, and the active spirit of inquiry early developed in his intel-

lectual career, had long since familiarised him with the main points and arguments of Christian controversy, to an extent very unusual in a layman of his somewhat sceptical generation. But though he viewed with charitable respect and good-will, every variety of conscientious belief among the professors of Christianity, and was ever roused to indignation by fanatical intolerance of sentiment or language, on the part of his own co-religionists, no man entertained a more profound conviction of the logical superiority which—in the judgment of Catholics—distinguishes the argumentative position of their Church, from that of every other denomination among the great Christian community, or a deeper sense of the purity and efficiency of the moral discipline involved in a strict adherence to the principles and practice of that Church.

It will not be matter of surprise that to one holding such opinions, and animated with such sentiments, the prevalent tone of Anti-Catholic controversy, at the period referred to, should have been a source of much irritation. Indeed, as day after day the columns of the press bristled with fierce attacks on his creed and his country, he could not wholly refrain from entering the lists in defence of a cause so closely associated with the memories of his race, and the highest interests of all he held most dear. In the spring of the year 1825 he addressed to the *Morning Herald* some letters, signed "Catholicus," in answer to a correspondent of that journal, who, under the signature of "Beza," had contributed his quota towards the no-popery agitation, by a series of epistles, assailing the faith of the Catholics, with more than the average amount of religious rancour, and an unscrupulous use of those stereotyped misrepresentations of their doctrines which, in those days,

supplied the most effective weapons of Anti-Catholic argument. This accidental participation in the passing controversy of the day, is an incident of so trivial a character, that it would be scarcely worth noticing in this biography, were it not to some extent illustrative of the activity and versatility of Sir Martin's mind, and connected with the existence of a state of feeling which may be traced in his correspondence with Miss Tunno, at this period, and is amply developed in the pages of "*Oldcourt*,"—a work which was the production of his leisure hours during the last year or two of stormy agitation on the subject of the Catholic disabilities, previously to the final settlement of that question in the session of 1829.

The year 1825 was a memorable epoch in the history of the Emancipation contest. It was marked by the labours of that famous Parliamentary Committee on the State of Ireland, which examined a host of witnesses, of every rank, from each side of the political arena, in minute investigation of the comprehensive subject, and daily recorded the most voluminous evidence, as to the condition of public feeling, the working of the electoral system in Ireland,—the doctrines, practice, and constitution of the Catholic Church, and its relations with the state and the people; while in contemporaneous activity, a semi-official negotiation was carried on with O'Connell and the other leaders of the Catholic party, respecting certain "securities," which, with a view of allaying the fears and removing the scruples of the opponents of Emancipation, it was proposed to annex to the forthcoming measure of relief to be submitted to Parliament.

Whatever may have been the object of the Government in conniving,—as they unquestionably did,—to

some extent, at the delusion thus practised on the Catholic leaders, who, in discussing "the wings," were led to believe that the concession on their part of the principle involved, would remove the chief obstacle to the passing of the bill,—the utter frustration of their hopes by the rejection of the measure, produced a degree of exasperation in the minds of the Irish Catholics, and a burst of frantic exultation on the part of their opponents, that tended greatly to increase the social evil of controversial rancour, which I have described as being so prevalent at the period in question. It is necessary to call to mind these circumstances, for the purpose of enabling the reader to account for the feeling of bitter despondency exhibited in the letter, some extracts of which I am about to lay before him;—a letter which, as will be seen by the date, was written during the panic occasioned by the disastrous commercial crisis, that cast such a gloom over the latter part of the year 1825.

To Miss Tunno.

"Cavendish Square, 10th of December, 1825.

"You say I may more reasonably ask why you do, than why you do not write to me. Were I to put either of these questions, I should fear a *candid* answer would not very much gratify my vanity. In the first instance, you would be obliged to confess that you write for my gratification, rather than your own, and, in the second, you would acknowledge that you began to feel the weight of a correspondence from which you derived so little pleasure or profit. . . . . .

"Poor Mr. O—'s decline was at last very rapid. . . . . He seems, however, to have been favoured in his end, as he suffered little, and was insensible to those circumstances which invest death with more than half its terrors. . . . . But let me not dwell, my dear Miss Tunno, on dismal topics like these. I could wish, indeed, to treat you to

some of an opposite character, but where am I to find them in times like these? Politics, commerce, and religion present nothing but the most unpromising aspects. Fraud and fanaticism,—bankruptcies and Bible societies,—the blowing-up of bubbles and mining companies,—the twin terrors of popery and paper money,—all combine to raise a real, and assist a pretended panic, which is artfully fed with all the materials of mischief. Oh, my dear Miss Tunno, I am sickened, even to the heart, to see what is now in progress towards the perpetration of madness and misery—to see the artful, hypocritical, and illiberal efforts now making to stir up all that is bigoted and base in the passions and character of as unenlightened and brutal a population, as ever committed riot and ravage in the persecuted, poverty-struck, half-starved regions of Tipperary,—against that unhappy race, who are so infatuated and criminal as to make the sign of the cross upon their foreheads, and sprinkle themselves with holy water. Every pious preacher of the Word which teaches charity and mutual love, and tells *us we should do as we would be done by*, is up in arms; every sword of persecution is starting from its sheath—every 'Praise-God-Barebones' is at his post—ready to *fight the good fight*, with his brand of discord in his hand, eager to hurl it amongst the howling hordes of fanatical fools and Gospel-trading hypocrites. Every engine of influence,—the parliament, the pulpit, and the press—every public meeting, and almost every private company,—all are energetically engaged in the great cause of defending this liberal and enlightened country against the dangers to be apprehended from the idolatrous and damnable doctrines of popery. They are all ready to pledge their lives and fortunes, their souls and bodies, their titles, tithes, and temporalities, to put down the mummeries, monkeries, and monstrosities of that worse than pagan superstition—to resist the machinations of blood-thirsty, priest-ridden papists, and rescue this only Christian and rational community, from the alarming spiritual and temporal encroachments of that most formidable potentate the Pope. . . . . Such, in short, are the artifices resorted to at present to irritate and inflame all classes against *us*, that I expect in a short time to exercise my pencil in painting 'no

popery' on my door as a means of guarding my house and family from the visitation of a Protestant *auto da fè*. To a man . . . . . who has respect enough for the religion of nine-tenths of the Christian world, and reverence enough for his ancestors, his country, his family, and himself, not to cast his religious professions in the mould of worldly interest — to such a man who has, I will say, in the present time, the honourable and hazardous imprudence to call himself a papist,—even the pleasures of social intercourse and private intimacy are interrupted and poisoned. If he has the additional honour and misfortune of being an Irishman, he can enter no company, public or private, but under the impression that, before he leaves it, he may have his feelings outraged by some brutal assault upon his creed or his country. Whether among the high or the low, the learned or unlearned, the old or the young, the topic is popery, and rancour and calumny the spirit in which it is discussed. Even young ladies descant on the dangers of Romish superstition; and a papist beau cannot set to his partner in a quadrille, without hearing from her pretty Protestant lips that Catholics *keep no faith* with *heretics*, and *have no regard for the obligation of an oath.* (*This incident occurred to one of my sons.*) Families with whom we have been in habits of intimacy for years, with whom we flattered ourselves we had established some little credit for moral and religious principle, we find, in some unguarded moment of argument or inadvertency, considering the unfortunate class to which we belong as hardly Christians—as being spell-bound in the most degrading circle of superstition, and holding doctrines of faith and practice that would disgrace the comparatively creditable ethics of the hulks or the Old Bailey. If the forms of politeness should save us from the open and abrupt declaration of these sentiments,—if the influence of friendly feeling should triumph so far over deep-rooted prejudice as to exempt us, in some degree, from the imputation of those atrocious maxims which, it seems, are inseparable from our abominable faith, we have the mortification to reflect that the suspicious acquittal is a sacrifice to personal partiality, in which we are complimented with the characters of morality and discretion, at the expense of our religion and our understandings.

But, my dear Miss Tunno, how shall I excuse myself for thus annoying you on a subject in which you can take so little interest, and which the enlightened liberality of your own nature can hardly believe capable of exciting acrimony or animosity amongst rational beings, much less persons calling themselves Christians. But I assure you such is the deep disgust produced in my mind by what I see and feel in the present, and contemplate in the future for my family, that if I had the means of subsistence in any other state of Europe, I would quit for ever a country which I consider the most bigoted and illiberal now existing amongst civilised states.

"I am now deep in Moore's 'Life of Sheridan,' which I believe you mentioned that you had read. I confess I have been entertained by it as far as I have gone, nor do I think it deserves the severity of criticism which some people are disposed to bestow on it. The style, though a little too ambitious and ornamental, is, I think, manly and correct. If I had been the biographer of Sheridan, I certainly would not have published to the world that he did not know how to spell. But, on the whole, he appears to favour him as much as a character for impartiality would allow. Mrs. Sheridan has also been managed with some delicacy and discretion. His politics seem generally unexceptionable, at least to those who are not supporters of the holy alliance. Sometimes, however, the cloven foot of Whiggery peeps out from under the graceful folds of his eloquence."

The mention of Moore in the last paragraph, suggests the insertion, in this place, of a slight anecdote connected with his name, and having some reference to the principal topic of the foregoing letter, or at least to the feelings which Sir Martin entertained on the subject of the religious faith in which they had both been educated. It is no hazardous assertion to state, what Mr. Moore's epistolary correspondence, edited by Lord John Russell, sufficiently demonstrates, that during a considerable portion of his life, his early impressions of reverence for the creed of his parents had given place

to more latitudinarian views in matters of religion. Later in his career, indeed, he gave abundant and convincing evidence of his deliberate and conscientious adhesion to the doctrines of the Catholic Church, in his "Travels of an Irish Gentleman in search of a Religion," a work as remarkable for the profound knowledge it displays of Christian antiquity and early ecclesiastical history, as for the controversial ability with which the results of the author's deep research and rare erudition are brought to bear on the contested points at issue between that Church and her assailants. At the period to which I am now referring, however,—a period long anterior to Catholic emancipation,—Moore's speculative acquiescence in the dogmas of the Church was rather an inference to be drawn from the absence of any overt act of apostasy, than a fact of which his outward conformity, or avowed opinions, could afford any reasonable assurance. So far, indeed, was he from making open profession of catholicity, that in the preface to one of his *opuscula* of poetical satire, he endeavoured to defend himself against the imputation of "popery," by stating that he was a general attendant at his parish church, and was educating his children in the faith of the Church of England.

Had this been the result of religious conviction, after due examination and conscientious adoption of the Anglican doctrines, neither the fact nor the statement could have been fairly open to censorious comment. But those among his friends who were most intimately acquainted with his views and opinions, well knew that however he might have shaken himself free from the trammels of religious faith and practice, in his own Church, his preference of Anglican Protestantism extended only to its temporal characteristics, as a form of

worship less irksome and exacting in its observances, and less injurious, in a worldly point of view, to the prospects of himself and his children. To Mr. Shee, therefore, who was in a position to estimate at their true value these deprecatory professions, their public manifestation appeared alike undignified and injudicious. Accordingly, with that straightforward frankness that ever characterised his intercourse with his friends, he took the opportunity of Mr. Moore's first visit in Cavendish Square, after the publication of the work in question, to express his deep regret at what he considered an unworthy truckling to popular favour on the part of Mr. Moore, and a practical denial alike of his ancestral faith and his real opinions. Somewhat nettled at this remonstrance, Moore broke out into an animated invective against priestly bigotry and intolerance, and, while disclaiming all intention of openly renouncing the creed of his fathers, avowed his distaste for much that was involved in the faith and practice of the Catholics. "I fear, my dear Moore," said Mr. Shee, "that it is not the peculiar doctrines of catholicity, but the principle of religious belief itself, which is the stumbling-block in your way." "You do me injustice," exclaimed Moore, "in supposing me deficient in religious feeling. No man," continued he, "has a deeper reverence for the *poetry* of *religion*." "Pooh, pooh, my dear fellow," rejoined his friend, "you mean the *religion of poetry!*"

It was during the session of 1825, while O'Connell was in London, in attendance on the Parliamentary Committee above referred to, that Mr. Shee first became acquainted with that eminent man. The few words that passed between them on the occasion of their introduction at a large evening party, are not

without a certain characteristic significance. On Mr. Shee expressing the satisfaction he felt in meeting one whose exertions in the cause of religious freedom in Ireland, had deserved the undying gratitude of his country. "Sir," said the great agitator, with oracular sententiousness, "*nations are never grateful.*" The philosophical or historical accuracy of this *dictum* might or might not be open to controversy; but the ready appropriation of high patriotic deserts which its enunciation implied, was somewhat discordant with Mr. Shee's theory of good taste, and had, for the moment, a slightly refrigerating effect on the enthusiasm of his "hero-worship."

In the spring of 1829, Mr. Shee gave to the world, through the medium of Mr. Henry Colburn, the eminent publisher, a three volume work under the title of "Oldcourt." On the title page it is designated as *a novel*, and this description is so far correct, that a slender thread of story runs through the book,—connected with which, there are several episodical narratives of greater or less importance. It is, however, in the main, little more than a vehicle for a great mass of moral, social, political, and semi-controversial disquisition, exhibiting, in striking variety, the workings of a deeply reflecting mind, in combination with a playful fancy, and a spirit of jocular sarcasm, not unbiassed by some considerable bitterness of feeling, on subjects connected with the wrongs and grievances of Ireland, and the apparent prospects of the great question of the day. Were the whole amount of reflections and observations, extraneous to the narrative and all but entirely unconnected with the development of character and incident in the progress of the fable to be extracted and separated from the body of the work, it would probably

furnish a respectably sized volume of essays that might well repay the trouble of perusal. But however the example of Fielding may be appealed to, as an authority for the introduction of discursive and episodical speculation, jocular or serious, into works of fiction, it is always a hazardous experiment as regards the popularity of the book in which it is to be found, and should, I think, be very sparingly indulged in by any writer whose reputation as a novelist is yet unestablished. The philosophy which tells most effectively in the course of exciting or amusing narrative is that which assumes an epigrammatic character. The most pungent maxims of La Rochefoucault, sprinkled judiciously over the pages of Le Sage or Hamilton, might perhaps have enhanced, if anything *could* enhance, the literary enjoyment of the reader of "Gil Blas" or "Fleur d'Epine." But it may fairly be questioned whether Waverley and Guy Mannering would have achieved such rapid and extensive popularity, had they embodied, and for the first time, presented to the public any considerable proportion of the sententious and oracular wisdom which excites our admiration in Bacon's essays. As a general rule, a man who takes up a novel looks rather for amusement than instruction. He seeks in its pages, some repose or relaxation from the cares or the serious business of life, and not an opportunity for the exercise of his reasoning or reflective powers. If the story be well constructed, and the interest cleverly sustained, he can hardly fail to be more or less impatient of any lengthened interruption to the development of the narrative, which the most able digression into the regions of philosophic speculation can supply. If he is so *unprincipled* as to resort to the deplorable practice of *skipping*, the uneasiness of his conscience under the

remembrance of the act, will naturally tend to produce a degree of dissatisfaction with the author who has betrayed him into so reprehensible a weakness, while if he conscientiously and courageously encounters the obstructive essay that impedes his progress, he is partially, at least, disqualified by his vexation, from appreciating the full value of the inopportune wisdom thus obtruded on his notice.

The fate of "Oldcourt" was certainly not such as to afford a practical refutation of the opinion I have here ventured to express. The book, published anonymously, attracted but little attention among the reading public, and was all but wholly unnoticed by the critical section of the literary world.

CHAPTER XI.

1830—1831.

Death of Sir Thomas Lawrence. — Speculations as to his Successor. — Mr. Wilkie appointed Painter in Ordinary to the King. — Mr. Shee elected President of the Royal Academy. — Election ratified by the King. — Popularity of the Appointment. — The Academy Dinner. — Peculiar Character of that Festivity. — Remarkable instance of Diplomatic Susceptibility in reference to the Ceremonial of the Day. — Important Question of Precedence. — Decision of the Prime Minister in accordance with International Law. — Magna Charta and the great Minuet Question. — Death of King George IV. — Visit of King William IV. and the Queen to the Exhibition. — Mr. Shee is presented, on his Appointment as President. — Receives the honour of Knighthood. — Is an official Trustee of the British Museum. — Appointed a Trustee of the National Gallery. — Is elected F. R. S. — Elected a Member of the Athenæum — of "the Club"—of the Society of Dilettanti. — Details as to the Office of Painter in Ordinary.

In the month of January 1830, the London world was startled and grieved by the announcement of the sudden death of Sir Thomas Lawrence. In the full vigour of his genius, enjoying an amount of popularity and personal consideration among the *élite* of society, seldom attainable by intellectual or professional merit, unaided by political rank or aristocratic station, he disappeared from the scene on which he had performed so graceful a part, without any warning of previous illness or gradual decay, to prepare the public mind for his loss, or call forth the speculations of the *dilettanti*, as to its effect on the interests of art, or the choice of his successor in the presidency of the Royal Academy.

Of the members of that body, no one, at the time, seemed less likely to create the first vacancy in their ranks. His regular habits, easy and amiable temper, and generally good health, had led his academic friends and brethren to anticipate for him, at the age of sixty-one, a long and tranquil occupation of that chair which he had filled, for the previous ten years, to the satisfaction alike of the public and the Academy.

The news of his unexpected decease was, therefore, received with as much surprise as regret; and occurring, as it did, during the recess of parliament, and at a period of temporary lull in politics, the event attracted an unusual degree of notice and attention from the press, as well as in the different circles of London society.

"*Who is to be the new President?*" was a question eagerly discussed in all quarters where the concerns of art were matter of interest or curiosity; and it was generally conjectured that the choice of the Academy would lie between Martin Archer Shee and David Wilkie. The high professional reputation and undoubted genius of the latter would probably have secured the acquiescence of a considerable portion of the public in his appointment to the vacant chair; and, if artistic merit and eminence had been the only recognised ground of selection, it would, indeed, be an act of signal injustice to the memory of that distinguished man, to represent his claims as inferior to those of any member of the body of which he was so conspicuous an ornament.

But to those best acquainted with the requirements of an office involving duties and responsibilities, on the judicious exercise of which the Academy depended, in great measure, for the maintenance of its social and official position in the eyes of the public,—it was evident that the personal and intellectual qualifications of Mr.

Shee were of a character to turn the scale in his favour, with such of the electors as had the interest of the institution most seriously at heart. If his exclusively professional claims could not be said to give him a decided superiority over the many eminent artists who at that time graced the ranks of the Royal Academy, it was generally felt that there was no one among them so well fitted for the discharge of the more important official functions connected with the office of President. His sound judgment, good taste, and gentlemanly feeling,—ever conspicuous in the academic councils,—were, in all matters of serious deliberation and administrative difficulty, enhanced by decision and firmness of view, strong powers of reasoning, and an eloquence as forcible and emphatic, as it was polished and refined. These qualities, combined with a graceful and high-bred demeanour, and a dignified independence of character and language, rendered him peculiarly fit to act as the official medium of communication on the part of the Academy with the Court on the one hand, and the ministry on the other.

At a period when questions of great importance and some delicacy, affecting the claims and position of the body, were "looming" in the distance,—bidding fair to test the diplomatic skill, as well as the moral energy, of those who were called upon to steer the academic vessel through the breakers that were visible at more than one point of her course,—the future President could not well have been selected on grounds wholly distinct from considerations of personal fitness, in reference to the peculiar, and, to some extent, abnormal duties, which would probably devolve upon him.

Three weeks elapsed between the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence and the meeting of the general assembly of

academicians, convened for the purpose of electing his successor in the academic chair. During this period, the public honours paid to his memory, and the imposing solemnity of the ceremonial with which his remains, escorted by a numerous and brilliant *cortége* of his friends and admirers,—comprising the highest and most conspicuous names in the political and social world,—were consigned to their last earthly resting-place in St. Paul's Cathedral,—tended greatly to keep alive the interest felt, throughout all the circles of London society, in the choice of the future President.

But however, in the interval, conjecture may have busied herself with the discussion of probabilities, or criticism dogmatised on conflicting claims, in reference to the result of the impending election, it is a curious but indisputable fact, that no one remained, during the period in question, more thoroughly in the dark as to the intentions of the Academy, than he on whom their choice was in reality about to fall.

Incapable, alike from pride and principle, of resorting to anything like canvassing or solicitation, for the purpose of obtaining a distinction which, however highly prized in itself, would have lost all attraction in his eyes, if it had not been spontaneously and freely conferred,—he studiously kept aloof from all communication with his brother academicians, beyond what was involved in his official attendance at the Academy, when the arrangements necessary for the purpose of exhibiting all due respect to the memory of their late chief, were under consideration in the general assembly:—occasions when a becoming feeling of delicacy would naturally exclude from the discussion, all reference to the claims or pretensions of those who might aspire to occupy his place.

On the other hand, if Mr. Shee scrupulously abstained from every proceeding which might have been interpreted as an attempt to feel the pulse of his brother electors at this important crisis, they, with a single exception, and that confined to one very slight occasion, as rigidly refrained from manifesting towards him, directly or indirectly, any feeling indicative of a bias in his favour.

The only member of the body who, during the interval that elapsed between the occurrence of the vacancy and the election, obtained or sought a private interview with him, was Sir Francis (then Mr.) Chantrey, who called in Cavendish Square, and had a rather lengthened conversation with him on academic affairs, about ten days after the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

The object of the visit, however, was by no means to intimate any intention, on the part of Sir Francis or his friends, of placing Mr. Shee in the vacant chair, but to sound him as to the expediency of effecting a total change in the practice which had theretofore prevailed in the appointment of a president, by substituting a system of rotation among the forty academicians, for the custom,—now sanctioned by permanent usage, from the foundation of the Academy,—of annually re-electing the individual whom their votes had once declared worthy to occupy the chair.

The grounds upon which Mr. Chantrey suggested this innovation, for which he cited the precedent of the French Academy, and other analogous cases, were, no doubt, referable to the comparative equality of claims among many of the leading members of the institution, and the apparent inexpediency of confining to one, the enjoyment of distinctions in which all might, in turn, be entitled to participate.

To this view of the case, Mr. Shee, as might have been expected from his devotion to the interests of the Academy,—apart from all consideration of his personal hopes or wishes,—declared himself strongly opposed. Such a course would, he urged, be perfectly suicidal as regarded the estimation of the body in the eyes of the public; while, in reference to the presidency itself, the effect would be to reduce a position of considerable official rank to the lowest level of administrative insignificance. The chair of the Royal Academy, viewed as an office to be retained for life, and attended with all the social *éclat*, inseparable from the public recognition of professional eminence and intellectual superiority, by the Crown and the Academy, held out to the ambition of the youthful and aspiring artist the highest incentive to his ambition,—the sole brilliant prize within the range and compass of his exertions. Divested of its character of permanent distinction, it could offer nothing to its temporary and casual occupant, which would repay the trouble involved in the performance of its engrossing duties, or give him a personal interest in the maintenance of its valueless and unmeaning prerogatives.

The result of the discussion was to convince Mr. Chantrey of the inexpediency of attempting any departure from the established course of proceeding. Whether, on mature deliberation, he fully acquiesced in the line of reasoning by which his suggestion had been met, or merely despaired of inducing the Academy to adopt a policy which was certain to meet with strenuous opposition, on the part of one so influential in the councils of the body as Mr. Shee, it is certain that he at once abandoned his project of reform or revolution, and with that straightforward frankness of character for which he was remarkable, determined to uphold the interests

and the dignity of the presidential office, in the person of him on whom the choice of the Academy should fall. During the remainder of his academic and social career, the chair of the Royal Academy had no more hearty or effective supporter of its just authority and influence, nor had the President a more attached and steady friend among the members of the institution, than Sir Francis Chantrey.

I have intimated that the discreet reserve maintained by the members of the electoral body towards Mr. Shee, in reference to their intentions in his favour, in the interval between the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence and the ballot for the choice of his successor, was slightly departed from, in one solitary instance. This was on the occasion of the breaking up of the meeting of the Academy, after their return to Somerset House from St. Paul's, on the day of the funeral. Mr. Shee was suffering from a severe attack of cold, which had rendered his attendance at the obsequies of his deceased friend and chief, almost a matter of personal risk. While about to put on his great coat among a number of his brother academicians similarly occupied, he was observed by Mr. (afterwards Sir Augustus) Callcott, who hastened to his assistance, remarking, in a low tone of voice, but with affectionate earnestness, as he wrapped the garment round him, "*You must take care of yourself; you are all we have to look to now.*"

These words were literally the only intimation he received of the academic feeling towards him, until the evening when the result of the ballot placed him in the chair.

The day fixed for the election (the 25th) at length came, and with it came a paragraph in the morning papers,—not by way of an entry in the Gazette,—the

official notification of which it anticipated, to the effect that David Wilkie, Esq., R. A., had been duly appointed to the office of Painter in Ordinary to His Majesty, vacant by the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

This, the only piece of court preferment connected with the arts in England, is an appointment in the department, and, ministerially speaking, in the gift of the Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's household; and it was no doubt creditable to the feeling of nationality, so prevalent among our brethren of the northern division of the island, that the Duke of Montrose, who still presided over that courtly section of the machinery of government, was impatient to place his distinguished countryman in an office of honour and emolument which had thus fallen to his disposal. Probably the early grant of the appointment, and undoubtedly its premature announcement in the columns of the daily press, might be reasonably ascribed to the hope of thereby influencing the votes of the Royal Academy in their choice of a President; as the nomination to an office held with so much *éclat* by Sir Thomas Lawrence, in conjunction with the academic chair, would, *primâ facie*, appear as an indication on the part of the Crown of a bias in favour of the candidate thus pointed out as the object of royal approbation.

How far the electors might have been induced to exhibit their deference for the presumed wishes of the sovereign, had they really ascribed to the notification in question the important significancy of a *congé d'élire*, it is unnecessary to conjecture. The result proved that they did not fear to assert their independence, and vindicate their right of free action against what was considered, by some at least, as an undue attempt to control their deliberative judgment, by the terrors,—in this case, very shadowy,—

of that royal prerogative, on the exercise of which the validity of their choice must ultimately depend.

What were really the personal wishes of the king on the subject,—if indeed, his Majesty, then in a declining and very precarious state of health, felt in any degree interested in the result of the election,—it is impossible now to ascertain; but it may not be improper to state, that, shortly after the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence Mr. Shee was informed by a personal friend, on the authority of a nobleman of very high rank and eminent political station, that the king, on being apprised of the loss sustained by the Royal Academy, had observed, in reference to the appointment of a successor to the presidency, "*Shee is their only man now.*"

The academicians met and proceeded to the ballot; when Mr. Shee was elected President by a large majority. On the result being announced from the chair, it was received with universal expressions of satisfaction by the assembled members, and some of those who, with manly frankness, openly avowed the fact that their votes had diminished the triumphant majority,—feelings of private friendship, and perhaps former pledges, distinct or understood, having induced them to give a complimentary support to claims of which they did not anticipate the success — were among the foremost to exhibit their cordial sympathy with the feeling which had prevailed against their reluctant opposition.

The gratifying event was communicated by Mr. Shee to his valued friend Miss Tunno, in the following letter, written on the day after the election.

"Cavendish Square, Tuesday, 26th Jan., 1830.

"My dear Miss Tunno,—At no moment of our lives do we turn to a beloved friend with so warm a heart as when we are affected by unexpected joy or sorrow. It is under the influence

of an emotion approaching to the former feeling, that my thoughts are turned to you, and that I find my pen in my hand hastening to inform you of an event, the first communication of which I should be sorry you were to receive from any other quarter. Know then, my most amiable friend, that I was, last night, by an overwhelming majority of votes, and a unanimous expression of satisfaction on the part of my brethren, elected President of the Royal Academy. The mode in which they have conferred on me this distinction, and the cordial manifestation of support given to me by those members who had themselves just reason for supposing that they ought to have been selected for such an honour, have, I confess, affected me more than the thing itself. The Academy have acted towards me with a spirit of liberality and disinterestedness which ought to excite my warmest gratitude. Without a movement on my part — without an attempt to employ the smallest influence in or out of the Academy,— knowing that I have neither wealth nor power—that I have no influence with the great, and have never basked in the sunshine of royal favour — and in the teeth of a *congé d'élire* which appeared in the newspapers the day before the election, announcing that our friend Wilkie had been appointed painter in ordinary to the king,— in spite of all this, they have made me President.

"Your long-continued kindness, my most valued friend, makes it impossible for me to doubt that this unexpected event will give you pleasure. I have the vanity even to believe that it will afford some satisfaction to excellent Mrs. Tunno and your amiable sisters. So that you perceive I am already become conceited on my elevation."

The choice of the Royal Academy was in due course ratified by the approval and sign manual of the king; and as far as public opinion could be ascertained from the comments of the press on the result of the election, that event appeared to give universal satisfaction.

Congratulations, personal and epistolary, poured in upon the new President from all quarters; and however

well prepared he might be for the eager expression of kind and cordial feelings, on the occasion, on the part of his private friends, he was equally surprised and gratified by the daily evidences he received of the high estimation in which his talents and character were held by a large number of his most distinguished contemporaries with whom he had no more than a slight and casual acquaintance.

The award of society appeared to be as decidedly in his favour, as the judgment of his brother academicians, re-echoed or cordially assented to, as it certainly was, by the community of art at large. He had also before long the gratifying assurance that his appointment met with the full approval of those exalted personages whose favour was of the highest importance to the interests of the body over which he was called upon to preside. The continued illness of the king, indeed, necessarily postponed the ceremony of his official presentation at court, and frustrated his Majesty's gracious and expressed intention of publicly investing the new President, at the levee, with the gold medal and chain which, in his royal munificence, he had bestowed on the Academy as the appropriate decoration of their head, and the permanent insignia of his distinguished office. But when Mr. Shee, as President, and in conformity with established *étiquette*, waited personally on the princes of the blood, with the customary invitation to the annual dinner given by the Royal Academy in their great room previous to the opening of the exhibition, his reception by their royal highnesses,—and in particular, by the Duke of Clarence, then heir-presumptive to the throne which he was destined so soon to ascend,—was of the most flattering nature, and such as to leave no doubt in the mind of

the President, as to the feelings of esteem and cordial good will entertained towards him by those august personages.

The day fixed for that great academic festival could not be looked forward to without some anxiety, as virtually the period of his public inauguration into the duties of his office. The task of presiding at a ceremonial, graced by the presence of all that was most exalted in rank, conspicuous in talent, and dignified in office, throughout the social and political world, was well calculated to tax the energies, and try the nerves, of the most accomplished and practical speaker. To one who, though not wholly "unaccustomed to public speaking," had been rarely called upon to address any numerous or severely critical auditory, the undertaking might well seem formidable; nor was it indeed the less so, that in spite of the limited range of his previous practice in that department of mental exertion, he had already acquired a reputation for eloquence, which justified, as it certainly excited, in the minds of a great majority of the guests assembled at the academic banquet, expectations of a more than ordinary display of oratorical power.

To the reader who may possibly be ignorant of the true nature and character of that singular convivial *spécialité*, known in the circles of art, and among the London world, as the *Academy dinner*, a few details on the subject will not perhaps be unacceptable; and indeed, without the knowledge of those peculiar features that distinguish the festive meeting in question, from the class of dreary convivialities, generally known and painfully encountered under the denomination of public dinners, it would be impossible to form an accurate

idea of the presidential functions and responsibilities as connected with that interesting occasion.

I should here observe that the particulars which I am about to state, have reference to the annual celebration, as it was understood and observed at the time of Mr. Shee's entrance on the duties of his office, and throughout the period during which he presided in person over the councils of the Royal Academy. Since the time when, from the declining state of his health, he ceased to take an active part in the administrative proceedings of the body, some important changes have, I believe, been introduced in the regulations affecting the annual dinner, which have, to a certain extent, modified its peculiar and exceptional character.

The Academy dinner, then, is not in strictness, nor was it, at the period to which I refer, in any sense, a *public dinner*. It is a banquet given by the President and members to a certain number of illustrious and distinguished guests, who are invited as the friends and patrons of the art, to partake of the hospitalities of the Academy, while surrounded by the annual display of native talent, arranged for the ensuing exhibition, in all the freshness of its attractive glories,—as yet unrevealed to the eye of the public. The cost of the entertainment is wholly defrayed out of the academic funds, and every individual who, as a guest, takes his place at the academic board, is present in virtue of a *special* and *personal invitation*, which can no more be the subject of transfer, than the card of the master of the household conveying Her Majesty's gracious summons to the royal table.

The number of persons who, according to long-established usage, are considered as entitled by ministerial or official rank, to permanent places on

the dinner list of the Academy, is so great that the range of occasional and strictly complimentary invitations is extremely limited; and this will be easily understood when it is borne in mind that,—irrespectively of the adult princes of the blood-royal, whose presence is always respectfully solicited,—the category of *ex-officio* guests, comprises, *inter alios*, all the cabinet ministers, the great officers of state and of the royal household, the members of the *corps diplomatique*, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Commander-in-chief of the army, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the chief judges of the superior courts of law and equity, the lord mayor, the attorney and solicitor-general, the heads of the several learned and scientific bodies, the chairman of the East India Company, the governor of the Bank of England, and the field officer of brigade, in waiting. In addition to these, whose invitations are strictly official, and therefore *de rigueur*, the principal statesmen and parliamentary leaders of "Her Majesty's opposition" for the time being, have, by prescriptive custom, a claim on the academic hospitalities, which is generally allowed either in courteous commemoration of past, or complimentary anticipation of future official rank.

Among those who are also permanently on the list, may generally be reckoned a few individuals conspicuous for their personal patronage of the art, or zeal in the promotion of those public objects involved in the establishment of the Academy, whose relations with that body, and the interests which it represents, entitle them to every complimentary observance at the hands of the institution.

The names of the late Lord de Tabley, Lord Farnborough, the late Mr. Vernon of Ardington, Sir John

Swinburne, Lord Overstone, Mr. Monro of Novar, and others, may be cited as falling within the class here referred to.

The number of invitations issuable by the President and council on these occasions, is strictly limited in reference to the size of the room, and the space afforded for convenient and comfortable distribution of the assembled company. It is therefore definitely fixed, and is not subject to fluctuation from casual or temporary causes;—nor should I omit to state, that by an express rule of the Academy, no place on the list, as agreed upon for the year, which may become vacant by reason of the invitation being declined from illness or unavoidable engagement, can be filled up by the substitution of a name not included in the original arrangement.

From these details it will be readily seen that the fluctuating invitations, — viz., those respecting which the President and council have, from year to year, a power of selection, are necessarily very few. The mode in which this discretionary privilege is exercised, constitutes one of the most remarkable peculiarities of this singular convivial institution.

The council being assembled to deliberate on the arrangements for the ensuing banquet, the secretary reads over to them the list of names included in the invitations for the previous year. Of these, probably more than nine-tenths are at once, and without controversy, recognised as persons entitled *de jure*, or by prescriptive enjoyment, to a repetition of the compliment, in accordance with established usage, as I have above described it. Wherever a name occurs, suggestive, or admitting, of a doubt as to the expediency of retaining its owner on the roll of academic hospitality, the point is mooted, and if condemned by the majority of the

council, the individual is "scratched." In this way, a certain number of the last year's guests, often persons of high rank or eminent station, but possessing no enduring claim on the much-coveted courtesies of the Academy, are eliminated, and a corresponding list of vacancies is produced for the council to fill up. The *residuum* obtained by this process of *precipitation* is generally so scanty, that the available invitations for new guests do not, I believe, exceed an average of ten or twelve.

The persons chosen to fill up these vacancies are selected *by ballot*, on the nomination of the several members of the council, in rotation, beginning with the President, who is first called upon to propose a name, and is followed by the other members in the order of seniority; each name being submitted to a separate ballot. The qualifications required by the practice of the Academy, and indeed, if I mistake not, by the letter of their laws as applicable to these invitations, are respectively high rank or station, eminent talent, and distinguished patronage of the arts. How rigid is the practical adherence to the principle embodied in these restrictive regulations, to the exclusion of all mere personal favour or affection in the bestowal of this much-coveted distinction,—the reader may gather from the fact that during the whole period of Sir Martin's presidency, no relative or family connection of his own, and no personal friend or acquaintance whose claims were not clearly admissible, apart from any consideration of the President's wishes or feelings on the subject, was ever honoured by an invitation to the Academy dinner, or ever suggested by him to the council, as a fit recipient of the compliment it involved.

Such being the nature of the assemblage collected

together in the great room of the exhibition, on the recurrence of this annual solemnity, it is no wonder that an admission to these select convivialities was valued as a privilege of a very gratifying character, invested with those attributes of strict and jealous exclusiveness, which, according to the ideas universally prevalent among us, confer so great a charm on circles inaccessible to heraldic insignificance, unredeemed by intellectual superiority.

I have said that the banquet in question is not a public dinner; and at the period to which I refer, its private character was rigidly maintained on a point which is of the very essence of publicity, viz., the admission of reporters for the public press. However interesting might be the proceedings of the day,—however brilliant the oratorical display which enhanced the enjoyment of a convivial meeting so remarkable for the splendour of its social *matériel*, and the attractive character of its local accessories,—the accents of eloquence found no faithful echo,—the words of wit or wisdom no commemorative record, in the broad sheets of the newspapers. The porter's list of illustrious, titled, and distinguished guests, was all that the strict exclusiveness of the Academy would concede for the gratification of external curiosity.

The rule was perhaps occasionally productive of some little disappointment to those who, called upon by official station, or in acknowledgment of a toast involving a personal compliment, to address the distinguished assembly, had felt that their mode of responding to the gratifying appeal, had been worthy of the occasion, and were not unwilling that the happy expression of sentiments, alike creditable to their own character as critics and men of taste, and auspicious to

the interests of genius, should meet with a more extended notoriety than the limits of that brilliant circle of applauding listeners would admit.

On the other hand, the individuals representing those important functions of the press, whose exercise was excluded on these interesting occasions, resented the rule as offensive to their order, and an encroachment on their usually recognised right of *omniscience;* and found, in its strict enforcement, an annually recurring source of irritation against the conduct and government of the Academy.

The existence of this feeling among so influential a section of the dispensers of fame, was believed to impart an occasional tinge of severity to the critical views of those whom the Academy, in their pride or independence, took so little pains to conciliate. But this was a result which the members made up their minds to encounter with placid equanimity ; — content to maintain the original spirit of their institutions, at a slight sacrifice of newspaper popularity; — and well aware that if, now and then, some oratorical Narcissus might experience a little disappointment at not finding the charms of his impassioned eloquence vividly reflected in that vast mirror of the national and social mind, supplied by the columns of the "Times," — the majority of their distinguished guests were far from considering the attractions of the festive scene diminished, by the fact of their being impervious to the prying eye of the "outer barbarian," and inaccessible, even in description, to the inroads of cockney curiosity.

While on the subject of the Academy dinner, I am tempted to relate an anecdote which, although slight in itself, and referable to a later period of Sir Martin's presidency, may be not inopportunely mentioned in

this place, as illustrative of the importance attached by some high personages to the ceremonial observances suitable to the occasion.

It need hardly be observed that the very high social or official rank of a vast proportion of the guests, imposed on the academic authorities the duty of bestowing a large share of careful attention on the appropriate marshalling of the places allotted to those who graced the table by their presence. The strict heraldic accuracy essential to the due performance of a court pageant, was not indeed supposed to be requisite; but the more familiar rules of precedence were adhered to with a reasonable degree of accuracy, and in subjection to certain established usages of the Academy, in the disposition of the guests in the vicinity of the chair. Thus, it had become the practice to place the magnates of the existing cabinet in due order on the right of the chair, — the Lord Chancellor, or, in his absence—the Lord President of the Council, occupying the post of honour, when no member of the royal family was present. On the left of the chair, were generally arranged such individuals of ducal rank, not members of the cabinet, as honoured the dinner by their presence; beginning with the Earl-Marshal, and following the order of seniority of patent, in their proximity to the chair. Ancient usage,—honoured rather in the breach than in the observance,—had long assigned a particular portion of the table to the members of the *corps diplomatique, en masse;* and this arrangement, although occasionally departed from in favour of some illustrious individual of that distinguished class, within the last few years of Sir Thomas Lawrence's presidency, was still habitually adopted during the rule of his successor, previously to the occurrence I am about to relate.

It happened that in the spring of 1834, the senior member of the *corps diplomatique* at the Court of St. James's, was the Russian ambassador, Prince Lieven. To this eminent personage, the usual summons to the Academy dinner was of course dispatched in due form. But instead of the customary written reply, accepting or declining the invitation, the secretary of the Royal Academy, the late Mr. Howard, was surprised to receive a visit from a gentleman connected with the Russian legation, who came on a special mission from the ambassador, to explain, by word of mouth, the existence of a diplomatic difficulty, of too subtle and delicate a nature to be communicated through the medium of pen and ink, but which, for the moment, rendered the question of his Excellency's attendance at the ensuing banquet, a matter of grave deliberation.

This individual was charged to convey to the Royal Academy, through Mr. Howard, the assurance of his Excellency's high respect for the institution and its members, and his anxious desire to enjoy the gratification of being present on so interesting an occasion; but he wished at the same time to intimate to the President and council, that as an ambassador of the highest class, and the senior, in point of residence, of the only two functionaries of that exalted rank then in London, he could not, consistently with what was due to himself, his sovereign, and his order, waive the unquestionable right of precedence belonging to him in his diplomatic character; and he wished therefore to have it distinctly understood, that his presence at the dinner could be accorded only on the condition that the place assigned to him, at the table, should be the seat at the right hand of and next to the President, provided, of course, that no member of the royal family were present to super-

sede the ambassadorial claim to this social pre-eminence.

The amiable and accomplished secretary, although *by right of birth*, a *herald*, did not feel authorised to pledge the Academy on a point of such weighty significance; but having politely bowed out his diplomatic visitor, with the assurance that the subject of his communication should be brought to the immediate notice of the higher academic authorities, and would no doubt receive their best and most respectful consideration, he proceeded at once to Cavendish Square, to lay the matter before the President.

Sir Martin, not a little amused at the occurrence, was, nevertheless, aware that small things may become of importance, when they relate to the pretensions and susceptibilities of very great people; and being unwilling to take upon himself the responsibility of deciding a question which involved the relative claims to academic observance of the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, in the person of Henry Lord Brougham and Vaux, and the Imperial Majesty of all the Russias, as represented by his Excellency Prince Lieven,—he determined to apply for counsel and guidance to the highest official and social authority to which his position gave him access; and accordingly, without an hour's delay, he sought and obtained an interview with the Prime Minister, the late Earl Grey, to whom, with as much gravity as was compatible with the nature of the subject, he duly submitted the point in deliberation, requesting the benefit of his lordship's views as to the expediency of acceding to the exacting demands of Russian diplomacy, on so momentous an occasion.

The question, if considered in a merely heraldic

point of view, was obviously one of very easy solution; and the result of the conference, conducted with no small amount of hilarity on the part of the illustrious statesman to whose official wisdom the appeal had been made, was in favour of abiding by the strict rule of courtly precedence which, throughout civilised Europe, assigns to ambassadors of the first class, a social position at the court, and in the country to which they are accredited, next in dignity to the princes of the blood, and consequently superior to that enjoyed by the highest nobility and most exalted official rank among the natives. The required assurance, therefore, was duly conveyed to Prince Lieven, that, in the event of his honouring the Academy by his presence at the dinner, his diplomatic privileges should meet with their full recognition on the part of the authorities. His Excellency accordingly enjoyed the much-coveted post of honour on the occasion, in strict conformity with the principles of courtly *étiquette* and the rights mutually conceded by the *comity of nations.*

The social records of the reign of Louis XV. supply a more striking example of the development of heraldic susceptibilities, in the celebrated *minuet case*, where a dignified address was drawn up and presented to that monarch, signed by a numerous body of the *haute noblesse*, protesting against the selection of a prince of the House of Lorraine, for the honour of opening a court ball with one of the princesses of the blood. And, as the name of Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, appears, in proud pre-eminence, at the head of that roll of warlike and sturdy barons who extorted and subscribed the great charter of our English liberties, so the first signature appended to the remonstrance of the terpsichorean chivalry of France, was that of a

great ecclesiastical peer of the realm, the Bishop of Noyon. But it seems probable that the academic incident, which I have above detailed, affords a solitary instance of a seat at a dinner-table having been, in England, made a subject of serious diplomatic negotiation, and high, if not *grave*, ministerial adjustment.

To revert to the first occasion when the task of presiding at the academic festival devolved on Mr. Shee, as the newly-elected President. On the morning of the appointed day, Mr. (afterwards Sir Robert) Peel, then Secretary of State for the Home Department, by the command of the king, sent to Mr. Shee the massive gold chain and medal worn by his predecessor, with a gracious message from his Majesty, adverting to his original intention of personally investing the President with this splendid decoration at the levee, and intimating the royal pleasure that it should be worn by Mr. Shee on all occasions when he should appear as President of the Royal Academy.

The continued indisposition of the king deprived the new President of the gratifying countenance which the presence of one of his Majesty's royal brothers at the dinner, would have afforded to the proceedings of the day. The Duke of Sussex had accepted the academic invitation; but obliged, under the circumstances, to abandon his intention of being present, His Royal Highness, also on the morning of the important day, sent a most flattering message to the President, by a gentleman of the duke's household, expressing the greatest regret that the state of the king's health made it necessary for his Royal Highness to absent himself on the occasion; adding that he had been most anxious publicly to state the high opinion he entertained of Mr. Shee's talents.

Few social triumphs, however, could be more complete than that which attended Mr. Shee's first performance of the duties in question. If unhonoured by the presence of royalty, he was cordially supported by the unanimous applause, and favourable judgment of a brilliant array of guests assembled, with feelings of unusual curiosity and interest, to witness his inauguration as President. Nor was it the least auspicious circumstance of the day, that he was sustained throughout by the friendly sympathy and cordial encouragement of one who, placed at his right hand, as the highest in official rank, was also the foremost in social and intellectual pre-eminence among that distinguished assembly,—John Singleton Copley, Lord Lyndhurst, then Lord Chancellor.

The death of King George IV., in the ensuing month of June, was an event not unfavourable to the interests of the Royal Academy, so far as the personal relations of the President with the court could be supposed to affect the prospects of the institution. For some years past, his Majesty's declining health and secluded habits had rendered all personal access to the royal presence, except at the ceremonial of a levee or a drawing-room, matter of great difficulty to those who were not strictly entitled by right of office, or on constitutional grounds, to demand an audience. Thus, notwithstanding the high degree of favour in which Sir Thomas Lawrence had long been held by his royal master, the important privilege of personal access to the sovereign, conceded from the first to the President of the Royal Academy, in reference to such matters as required the royal approval and sanction, had fallen into desuetude; and the academic documents which, from time to time, had to be submitted for his Majesty's sign

manual, were forwarded through the Home Office, and confided to the care and intervention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Shee, as we have seen, had long been personally known to his Majesty's august successor; and the straightforward character of that amiable and right-minded monarch afforded the best guarantee, that on a simple representation of the practice, as established on the formation of the Royal Academy, under the sanction of King George III., and continued, without interruption, during the remaining years of his Majesty's public life, the Academy would be at once re-instated in the enjoyment of the right, thus temporarily suspended. The result was in strict accordance with this anticipation. On one of the earliest occasions which admitted of the introduction of the subject to his Majesty's notice, a humble request was preferred on the part of the Royal Academy, praying that the privilege in question, so graciously conceded to that body by their august founder, his Majesty's royal father, might be enjoyed and exercised by the official representatives of the Academy, to the same extent, and in the same manner, during the new reign, as it had been enjoyed from the earliest period of the academic annals. To this the king, avowedly anxious to follow, in everything connected with the institution, the precedents established by his revered father, at once and unhesitatingly acceded.

On the 19th of July, the King and Queen, for the first time since their accession, visited the Royal Academy, for the purpose of inspecting the exhibition, then recently closed to the public. Their Majesties, who were accompanied by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and a brilliant *cortége* of ministerial and

official personages, including Mr. Peel, the Home Secretary, were received by the President, council, and officers of the Academy, and attended through the rooms by Mr. Shee. On the arrival of the royal party at Somerset House, Lord Farnborough, who was in the suite of their Majesties, was taking upon himself the duty of introducing the new President to the notice of the King, when His Majesty interrupting him, observed: "Oh, my lord, that is unnecessary; I am very well acquainted with Mr. Shee, and have recently had the pleasure of introducing his name, on two public occasions, when I heard him make two of the most eloquent speeches I have ever heard;"—referring to the anniversary dinners of the Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatrical Funds, at which His Majesty, then Duke of Clarence, had that year presided, on both of which occasions he had proposed the health of Mr. Shee, as the newly-elected President of the Royal Academy, in highly flattering terms. Throughout the visit the King treated the President with the most gracious cordiality and marked distinction, and on taking leave, His Majesty said to him: "You will come to the levee to-morrow, where of course I shall knight you;" which announcement was the first and only intimation Mr. Shee received of His Majesty's intention to confer upon him the honorary distinction in question; for which, however, as being officially entitled to it, by established usage, he was not unprepared.

On the following day (July 20) he was in due form presented to the King at the levee by the Right Honourable Robert Peel, Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, and kissed hands on his appointment as President of the Royal Academy,

when His Majesty conferred upon him the honour of knighthood.

In virtue of the presidency, Sir Martin had become, *ipso facto*, an official trustee of the British Museum. In due course, also, he was appointed to succeed Sir Thomas Lawrence, as one of the trustees of the National Gallery.

He had, many years previously, refused to be put in nomination at the Royal Society, for the degree of F.R.S.; assuredly from no want of respect to that distinguished confraternity, but from an unwillingness to multiply the claims on his leisure hours, and perhaps, in some degree, from a feeling that his attainments in the department of exact or severe science, were not such as to render him a practically useful addition to the ranks of so learned a body. But the point being now urged upon him anew by some influential members of the council of the Royal Society, he deemed it discourteous again to decline the intended compliment, at a period when, as the official head of an institution representing the interests of art, he was, in an especial manner, bound to exhibit his sympathy and respect for the kindred claims of science. He was, therefore, with all convenient despatch, enrolled among the fellows of the Royal Society.

On the formation of the Athenæum Club, a few years previously, he had been applied to by both Sir Thomas Lawrence and Mr. Croker, who took a very active part in the establishment of that body, to allow his name to be included in the list of the proposed members; and he had subsequently received from the committee an official application to the same

effect. It was, however, at a time when he had but recently withdrawn his name from the "Alfred," not from any dissatisfaction with the *matériel* or management of that eminent society, then in full prosperity and high favour with the London world, but because his professional duties and peculiarly domestic habits combined to disqualify him for the enjoyments of a club life. Having, therefore, but lately retired from what he justly considered the best club in London, he had felt no disposition to join the new social and intellectual confederacy, however promising its *programme* and auspicious the circumstances under which it was called into being. He had accordingly declined, with all due respect, to join the Athenæum. It was, however, and I believe still is, a fundamental rule of that distinguished club, that the President of the Royal Academy, for the time being, must be one of the five trustees in whom the property and chief executive functions of the club are vested. On Sir Martin's appointment as President of the Royal Academy, therefore, he became, *ex officio*, a trustee of the Athenæum, without being a member of the club.

Unwilling to repudiate any species of social obligation fairly attaching to the presidency, and sensible of the complimentary spirit towards the arts and the Academy in which the regulation in question had been framed, he at once, in answer to a respectful application from the committee, assured them of the gratification it would afford him to be enrolled in the ranks of the club, and assume the duties connected with the office of trustee. He was, in consequence, forthwith elected, without form of ballot, by acclamation of the committee.

The vacancies created in the Society of Dilettanti and in "*the Club*," *par excellence*, by the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence, were also, with much complimentary *empressement* on the part of those eminent bodies, filled up by the substitution in his place, of his successor in the academic chair.

I have related these facts, not as being in themselves of any great significance in the way of personal tribute to Sir Martin, but in order to show that the necessary result of his election as President, was to call at once into active operation a variety of official, social and administrative claims on his time and attention, involving no inconsiderable amount of trouble, and in the aggregate, a very heavy expense.

In his instance, however, the appointment to the emoluments of which he might not unreasonably have been led to look, as a means of at least partial reimbursement, in the case of those increased demands on his pecuniary resources, to which his distinguished office thus inevitably exposed him, had, as we have seen, been hastily, and with a very obvious view to the result of the election, bestowed elsewhere. Had the appointment in question been unconnected with duties appertaining exclusively to that branch of the art in which he was habitually engaged, and on his success in which his reputation as an artist mainly depended, its dissociation from the office of President would have afforded no fair ground of animadversion. But the post of painter in ordinary to the king was essentially an appointment which called into play the talent of the portrait painter. Its official functions were mainly, if not exclusively, exercised in relation to the art of portraiture; and, as a necessary consequence, it ap-

peared to fall naturally to the share of an artist whose distinctive eminence had been attained in that department of the profession.

Accordingly, if not always held in conjunction with the presidency of the Academy, it had been united with that office in the persons of those among Sir Martin's predecessors in the chair, who had devoted themselves habitually to portraiture. At the date of the establishment of the Royal Academy, the office was, and had been for some years, held by Allan Ramsay, a portrait painter of some reputation in his day, son of the celebrated poet of that name; and on the death of this gentleman, it was bestowed on Sir Joshua Reynolds, then President of the Royal Academy, who retained it during the remainder of his life. His immediate successor in the academic chair, Benjamin West, was, I need hardly say, devoted to historical painting, and exclusively engaged on works connected with that, the highest department of the profession. In this application of his great powers to the noblest purposes of the art, he was encouraged and sustained by the sympathy and liberality of the King (George III.), who, while authorizing him to assume the title of historical painter to his Majesty, assigned him an allowance of 1000*l.* per annum from the privy purse:—a provision which he enjoyed down to the period at which his Majesty's unfortunate malady finally incapacitated him for the active functions of royalty, when it was, with characteristic vandalism, and unfeeling disregard for the interests of the venerable President,—then upwards of seventy years of age,—withdrawn by the first ministry of the regency.

Had the office of painter in ordinary been considered as a merely complimentary appointment, requiring no peculiar qualifications, but bestowable according to the preference of the sovereign, without any regard to official fitness in connection with its duties, there can be little doubt that the claims of the President, Mr. West, who enjoyed the personal favour of King George III., to a much greater extent than his illustrious predecessor in the chair, would have prevailed over those of all other candidates or expectants on the occasion. But Mr. West was not a portrait painter; and in accordance with official precedent, an artist of the latter class was selected to fill the vacancy. The place was conferred on Mr. Lawrence who, at the early age of twenty-three or twenty-four, was already well established in public favour, and enjoying a reputation for successful portraiture which rivalled, if it did not as yet eclipse, the fame of the most eminent of his professional contemporaries,—all greatly his seniors in age.

It was natural to suppose, therefore, that when the office became again vacant by the death of Sir Thomas Lawrence, the same principle would be adhered to in the choice of his successor; and Sir Martin's friends could not but feel that by the appointment of Mr. Wilkie, before the question of the presidency was decided, the latter office had, in a somewhat irregular manner, been deprived of a substantially beneficial adjunct, which, had the matter been left open until after the academic election, could not have been judiciously or gracefully separated from it in the case of a President, whose professional qualifications for the appointment of painter in ordinary, like those of his

immediate predecessor, did not admit of controversy, and accorded strictly with the official definition of its duties.

Wilkie, however, it may be said, had also painted portraits. And it is true that within a year or two of the period to which I now refer he had occasionally deviated from his accustomed professional path, to essay his strength in portraiture of life size. Nor can it be disputed that the genius which had guided his hand in those regions of art with whose glories his name is peculiarly associated, sustained his efforts in this unwonted career, at a height far above the level of mediocrity, and safe from the discredit of failure. But although the love of novelty, and the critical enjoyment to be found in depreciating, by comparison, the long established claims of too familiar talent, might seem, at the time, to expand a qualified and relative success, into an absolute triumph, it may without injustice to the memory of that great artist, be confidently asserted that no portion of his well-earned and enduring fame rests upon the result of these exceptional labours: and indeed, those who most fondly cherish his remembrance, and proudly enjoy the reflected light of his renown, would probably be the last to acquiesce in any representation of his distinctive merits, which should affect to class him among the portrait painters of his time.

The question of this appointment would, indeed, have been of small moment in a pecuniary point of view, if its advantages had been estimated merely in reference to the bare amount of the official salary, which, as in the case of many ancient offices of higher pretensions, is, I believe, absurdly small. Its actual

profits, indeed, during Sir Joshua's tenure of the office, are alleged to have been, from his mode of dealing with it, very inconsiderable. To Sir Thomas Lawrence, however, it had been from the first, and, if I mistake not, continued to be down to the time of his death, a valuable source of emolument.

It was derived, in part at least, from the number of state portraits of the sovereign,—and while there was a Queen Consort, of her Majesty also,—which ancient usage required to be executed for the adornment of certain official residences, and the duty of executing which devolved, as of right, on the painter in ordinary. Thus, it was considered proper that the mansion of every ambassador or high diplomatic agent of the crown, in the capital of the foreign court to which he was accredited, should exhibit, in its reception rooms, whole-length portraits of the King and Queen of England. These works, however, were not understood to be fixtures in the official domicile. They were presents from the sovereign to the individual ambassador, and remained his property, as part of the honourable trophies of his exalted office, on his retirement from the scene of his diplomatic labours. Every fresh appointment therefore among the chiefs of the *corps diplomatique*, involved a fresh state commission for the court painter: — and royal whole lengths, usually copied by that functionary himself from the most successful efforts of his pencil, in portraying the august form and features of the reigning king and queen, were multiplied at not unfrequent intervals, and duly paid for according to the artist's usual rate of remuneration for works of the size and class of the original pictures in question.

Of this practice, Allan Ramsay and his predecessors in the office, had enjoyed the benefit. But when Sir Joshua, rather late in his brilliant career, accepted the appointment, its pecuniary advantages were to him a matter of indifference; and the task of reproducing or reduplicating these courtly triumphs of the pencil, had but little attraction in his eyes. This state of the official mind, on the part of the painter in ordinary, must have met with some co-operative sympathy in certain high diplomatic quarters, where the amount of zeal for the public service was not, it is to be hoped, in exact proportion to the value set upon the "counterfeit presentment" of the sovereign. For at the time when the office became again vacant by the death of Sir Joshua, a practice had, it is said crept in, and was then sanctioned by the authority of numerous precedents, in conformity with which the court compounded for the costly and perhaps rather cumbrous present which the newly-appointed ambassador was in theory entitled to receive from the crown on his nomination, by the payment of a fixed sum of money, the amount of which, although no doubt greatly inferior to the cost of the work or works of art for which it was substituted, was perhaps more practically available for his Excellency's benefit or convenience.

Mr. Lawrence, however, on his appointment to the office, did not think it expedient to follow the example of Sir Joshua in his waiver of that official right, the non-assertion of which had practically degraded a graceful compliment on the part of the crown, to the undignified level of a pecuniary job. It was soon understood and arranged that thenceforth the diplomatic pictures were to have something more than a fictitious

or ideal existence ; and accordingly, from that time, whenever an occasion occurred which was calculated, in conformity with the old rule, to bring into play these courtly demonstrations of royal favour, the diplomatist was permitted to claim, and the court painter commissioned to execute the appropriate work of art.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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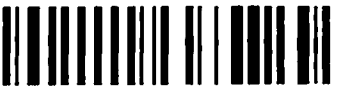
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